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ABSTRACT

This study used qualitative research methods to construct a portrait of students between the ages of 18 and 24 who chose to attend a rural community college. Lengthy interviews were conducted with 12 volunteer participants throughout their first year of college, and in some cases continued into their second year, to gather data about their college-going decisions, including responses about the people, events, and information that led them to choose that college. The data also includes information about the first year experiences of the participants, their financial concerns, and their later evaluation of the decision to attend college. Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure was used as a theoretical framework to analyze the interview data. Results included: (1) the participants were found to be very diverse in all three of Tinto's pre-entry attributes--family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling; (2) the students' pre-entry attribute of family background was found to be an important factor in their decision to attend the community college, and their family background also strongly affected the other two pre-entry attributes; and (3) students whose families had relocated several times during the students' public school years experienced difficulty maintaining the academic credits and continuity needed to prepare an extended college search. (Contains 97 references.) (JA)

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A PORTRAIT OF TRADITIONAL-AGE STUDENTS AT A RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Mary Susan MacMichael

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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A PORTRAIT OF TRADITIONAL-AGE STUDENTS

AT A RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Mary Susan MacMichael

has been approved

November 1999

APPROVED:

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ABSTRACT

This study uses qualitative research methods to construct a portrait of students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four who chose to attend a rural community college. Long interviews were conducted with twelve volunteer participants throughout their first year of college, and in some cases continued through their second year, to gather data about their college-going decisions, including responses about the people, events, and information that led them to choose this small college. The data also includes information about the first year experiences of the participants, their financial concerns, and their later evaluation of the decision to attend college.

Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure is used as a theoretical framework to analyze the interview data. The participants were found to be very diverse in all three of Tinto's pre-entry attributes: family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling. The students' pre-entry attribute of family background was found to be an important factor in the their decision to attend the community college, and their family background also strongly affected the other two pre-entry attributes. Students whose families had relocated several times during the students' public school years exerienced difficulty maintaining the academic credits and continuity needed to prepare an extended college search. Students also showed a lack of information about colleges in general, and had many misconceptions about college life.

Further research is recommended on the effects of multiple school relocations on high school students. Policy recommendations are made to strengthen orientation programs that involve family members at both the high school and college level, and to tailor these programs to the characteristics of the local community.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Purpose of the Study	3
Research Design	3
Research Questions	4
Limitations of the Study	4
Overview of the Study	5
2 LITERATURE SEARCH	8
Overview	8
Community Colleges in the United States	8
College Choice	12
The College Experience	15
The Rural United States	26
Rural Community Colleges and Their Students	30
3 METHODOLOGY	33
Overview	33
Qualitative Research	33
Grounded Theory	36
Design Features	37
The Setting	42
Research Procedures	47
Data Analysis	52

CHAPTER		Page
4	INTERVIEW DATA	55
	Overview	55
	The Twelve Participants	57
5	DATA ANALYSIS	101
	Overview	101
	Pre-Entry Attributes	103
6	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	123
	Overview	123
	A Portrait of Students at a Rural Community College	123
	Policy Recommendations	130
	Suggestions for Further Research	137
REFERENCES		140
APPENDIX		150
A	Interview One Questions	150
B	Interview Two Question	152
C	Interview Three Questions	154
D	Interview Four Questions	156
E	Sample Memo	158
F	Codes	160
G	Script for Classroom Solicitation	162
H	Consent Form	164
I	University of Chicago Press Permission	166

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Participant Information	56

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure	20
2	Helen's Pre-entry Attributes	121

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

More than 600 rural community colleges provide access to higher education for students in sparsely populated regions of the United States (Sullins & Atwell, 1986). These community colleges do not generally attract traditional-age college students, those students between the ages of 17 and 24 years old who are recent high school graduates. In the 1990's, the average age of students attending a two-year college was 28 years old, but some younger students choose to attend rural community colleges, and every age cohort is important to the individual community college that strives to provide educational quality and program diversity. As community colleges continue to grow steadily, bringing national enrollment to over five million students, every age group is represented in substantial numbers at this level of education (The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1997).

Traditional-age students at the community college level are the students most likely to transfer to a four year college; approximately 56 percent are attending college to prepare for transfer (AACJC Statistical Yearbook,1988). Consequently, this population is important for sustaining the transfer function of the community college, giving local residents who plan to complete the first two years of a bachelor's degree the opportunity to accumulate credits at a lower cost while living at home. These students increase the enrollment in the liberal arts courses, making them economically viable for the college to offer. The traditional-age student enriches the offerings of the college and provides a continuing source of student enrollment that is less susceptible to local and regional changes in the economy and the community.

The traditional-age student who is not planning to transfer to a university also needs access to critical educational services. This population is the most likely to spend their working years adapting to rapid changes in technology, occupational requirements, and possibly the entire structure of the industrial, business, and professional worlds.

The mission of community colleges is to respond to the educational needs of every population cohort by providing a comprehensive curriculum. Although there are diverse perspectives of this mission, it is generally agreed that there are five curricular areas for a comprehensive program: academic transfer preparation, vocational-technical education, continuing education, remedial education, and community service (Cohen & Brawer, 1989). Rural community colleges have developed comprehensive programs, often with limited resources, that offer a vital educational link to students who are one of the most geographically and culturally isolated groups in the general student population.

Statement of the Problem

In preparing this study, I was able to find very little research on rural community colleges, and almost none on the traditional-age students who choose to attend them, a problem noted by other researchers (De Young, 1987). Rural community colleges need research to help define and understand the student populations that enter their institutions (Ford & Griffin, Jr., 1995). They have limited resources to provide the most effective and efficient services and programs (Griffin, Jr., 1995). Current research on the criteria used by high school graduates to choose a college is not necessarily useful to the administration, faculty, or researchers at rural colleges. Most research is generic in nature, focusing on why the students chose to attend college, ignoring two-year college students as a separate population, and grouping urban, suburban and rural college populations together (Absher & Crawford, 1996; Canale, Dunlap, Britt, & Donahue, 1996; Dixon & Martin, 1991; Gilmore, Spiro, & Dolich, 1981; Ponessa, 1995; The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1997). Additionally, much of the previous research on community college populations has focused on predicting future enrollments and has been highly inaccurate (Trow, 1988). Specifically, I think rural community college staff members could benefit from knowing why students would choose to stay in the home community for their post-secondary education rather than travel to a larger

regional or urban college that might offer more in terms of reputation, financial aid, diversity of programs, and social experiences.

In many areas of the United States, regional and state universities compete aggressively for high school graduates. Within this competitive system, the rural community college could focus its resources better by enlarging its base of student information, and by developing programs, services, and an environment that appeal to the traditional-age student.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to collect information about student characteristics that would assist college faculty and administrators to recruit students and devise marketing plans, curriculum, student services, and degree programs for this specific rural population. This information would be helpful in managing enrollment trends and in building retention. With more information, college administrations could address problems of geographic isolation, and possibly prepare more accurately for future changes in the distribution of the population. In structuring this study, I wanted to emphasize that understanding the student population as a group of individuals with diverse and complex lives can assist in building a college's reputation for responding to the entire community and specifically to student educational needs. By developing more specific information about student populations, in this case a population that has rarely been studied, the college can use its limited resources more effectively.

Research Design

This study was designed to include long interviews of twelve students registered in classes at a rural community college between the fall of 1997 and the spring of 1999. The interviews were conducted periodically during each student's beginning and subsequent semesters, totaling four interviews with most of the students. The first interview included specific questions regarding the student's age, educational

background, and the decision to attend college. I assumed that factors important to each student and to the decision-making process, but unknown before the initial interview, would emerge. Consequently, these factors were explored in the following interviews along with questions regarding the student's progress at the college.

Memoing, coding, and inductive analysis of the interview data formed concepts of how students made the decision to attend a rural community college. In analyzing the data, I have used Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Student Departure as a theoretical framework (Tinto, 1993, p. 114). Although I reviewed some of the literature concerning college choice to develop the initial interview questions, a post-review was more extensive to assist in generating hypotheses on the specific characteristics of these twelve students.

Research Questions

The study explored the following questions concerning college choice: Why did the student choose to attend this specific rural community college? What events led up to this decision? What information did the student have when making the decision? Who or what influenced this decision? What comparisons did the student use to evaluate the decision? Did the student's financial or work responsibilities influence the decision? What is the student's perspective of the need to attend college, and how is that related to choosing a rural college?

Limitations of the Study

This study is exploratory in nature. Like all qualitative research it is not an attempt to prove or disprove a theory. It is meant to gather information from participants and from research literature, allow data to emerge, and then pull some meaning from the data to achieve a sensible understanding of how students decide to attend a rural community college. Because this is an in-depth study of one institution, the findings are not meant to be generalized to all rural community colleges. Educational institutions in the United

States are so diverse, they can only be understood on an individual basis. (Tinto, 1993; Cohen, 1996).

Qualitative research has limitations implicit in relying on the self-reported information of the participants. Student recollections are sometimes hasty, and they offer only one perspective of a complex process. The interviews in this study were informal and conversational because the student participants knew me or knew about me as an instructor on campus. This approach generated extensive information. In most cases, the participants were very generous in discussing their lives. However, since very personal issues such as course failures, family problems, alcohol and drug addiction, and financial background were touched on in the interviews, I was aware that there were many important influences in the lives of these students that they chose not to discuss openly or at length.

Overview of the Study

The goal of this study was to portray twelve students currently enrolled in a rural community college, and explore their college choice through a qualitative process of open-ended interviews. In Chapter Two, I discuss the research literature of four related areas: community colleges in the United States, college choice, characteristics of the rural areas of the United States, and finally, rural community colleges and their student populations.

Chapter Three explains the importance of using a grounded theory approach to this research, and includes the characteristics of qualitative interviews. I then describe the design features of this study, the setting in which it took place, and the specific procedures followed, including soliciting volunteers, devising questions, and conducting interviews.

Chapter Four presents the interview data from each of the twelve participants in

alphabetical order by pseudonym. The students are arranged by their relative aquaintance with the college, so that the first two participants are students who have just completed some of the lowest level developmental classes on campus. The following four participants are within their first semester of taking college level classes. And the last six participants have been at the college for at least two semesters. The early interviews cover general student background and the events that led to the decision to enroll at the college. Later interviews present their comments on classes and other campus experiences.

In Chapter Five, I analyze the collected data by using Tinto's Model of Student Departure as a theoretical framework. Within this framework, I discuss student pre-entry attributes, especially the complex nature of these attributes, and their effect on each student's commitment to educational goals and to the community college. Issues that emerged from the data, such as relocations during a student's years in elementary or secondary school, are explored. The later section of the chapter portrays student adjustment to the college, their academic progress, and in some cases their subsequent withdrawal.

In Chapter Six, I summarize the findings of the study by presenting a portrait of these twelve students. They are a group with very diverse pre-college characteristics who approach the community college with diverse goals and aspirations. This diversity, as well as other pre-entry student attributes was generally related to the student's family background. Also, another general conclusion I drew from the data is that these participants had a lack of information about the college and many misapprehensions.

In this chapter, I also make policy recommendations and suggestions for further research that would assist college personnel in understanding the traditional-age students who enter the rural community college. I found that the lives of many of the students in this study called for a need to identify student services that address specific problems of

college orientation. All but two of the students in this study had a history of school relocations that created academic or social problems. Without question, more research on how students experience relocations during the public school years would be helpful in providing services at the college level. Addressing the diversity of students who entered this community college has to be an on-going, well-informed process.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE SEARCH

Overview

In this chapter, I will review the literature on community colleges and their traditional-age populations. The search will include general information about community colleges and their mission within the educational system of the United States and what is known about how students choose to attend a specific college. I will discuss the current research on what is known about the characteristics of students who stay in college, or leave it before completing a degree; how this information differs for community college students; and how these factors relate to the rural areas of the U.S. and their community colleges.

Community Colleges in the United States

There are 1,397 public community colleges in the United States with a total enrollment reaching over five million students, and demographic estimates point to continuing growth through the next decade (The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1997). For the purposes of this study, I will discuss only public institutions which are considered two-year colleges and which offer the Associate degrees. Although many community colleges, like the larger institutions in Florida, California, and Arizona, enroll over 20,000 students, the majority of two-year colleges have fewer than 5,000 students enrolled. Approximately 700 institutions which have fewer than 2,500 student headcount are classified as small and/or rural colleges by the American Association of Community Colleges (Griffin, Jr., 1995).

The first public two-year college opened its doors in 1901 in Joliet, Illinois, and was considered to be an extension of the secondary school system offering mainly liberal arts courses as grades 13 and 14 (Bogart, 1994). It was not until the 1960's that the number of colleges increased rapidly in the United States with total student enrollment growing by 240 percent between 1965 and 1975 (AACJC, 1988b). At that time, the

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mission of these institutions expanded beyond the original scope of providing the first two years of a liberal arts education. As the mission became more comprehensive, the name community college often replaced the previous designation of junior college used since the early 1900's. This new comprehensive mission provided educational services to local communities including: college transfer courses; literacy and language skills development; occupational, recreational and technological courses; and community cultural classes and events (Bogart, 1994; Gleazer, Jr., 1994). The expansion of the community college curriculum has been so rapid, and in some cases so unwieldy, that it has often generated criticism for trying to be all things to all people (Cohen & Brawer, 1989). In fact, members of the local community are not always familiar with the curriculum of their local institution (High Desert Community College Environmental Scan).

Community College Students

The comprehensive curriculum, low cost, and the nonselective admissions policy, called open admissions or the open door policy, maintained by most community colleges draws community members of all educational levels into these institutions. Research shows that students in community colleges are less likely to be recent high school graduates, are more likely to be the first generation in their families to attend college, are more likely to be at risk academically, and about 46 percent are receiving financial aid to attend college (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Tinto, 1993).

Another notable characteristic of the population of community college students is diversity in race, socio-economic status, ethnicity, age, and level of educational background:

> "...in many (community colleges) there will be found recent high school graduates just beginning their college work on the one hand, and adults who already have college degrees on the other. There may be adults learning basic verbal and

numeracy skills as well as those qualifying for a certificate of high school completion. A high proportion of learners is qualifying for job entry or to be upgraded in employment" (Gleazer, Jr., 1980, pp. 8-9).

This diversity is not just evident in terms of students' educational background, but is further complicated by the goals and aspirations that students bring to the college. Students of different ages and in different academic programs report different goals for attending the community college. More than 50 percent of students 20 years old or younger indicate that they attend a community college to prepare for transfer to a four-year college compared to only 36 percent of older students. And 50 percent of liberal arts students of all ages intend to transfer, more than double the number in other degree programs (AACJC, 1988b, p. 37). Even among specific smaller groups within the community college, such as first-generation minority students, there is a diversity in opportunity orientation, the beliefs students hold about the part education plays in leading toward adult roles, and in student preparation and mode of college going (Richarson & Skinner, 1992).

The open admissions policy has also provided access to higher education for many traditional-age students who had difficulty in secondary school. Cross (1976) points out that women and minorities are often considered the students who are new to the college sytem and have dramatically increased the enrollment in community colleges; however, the lowest achieving one-third of high school students are also a newer addition to the community college population. The addition of students who are underprepared for academic work has in turn changed the community college curriculum in various and dramatic ways. Occupational, vocational, developmental, and adult basic education have all become standard offerings of community colleges as they strive to serve community needs and maintain college enrollment levels. In fact, developmental courses in English and mathematics account for more than one-third of all courses offered by community

colleges in those areas (Cohen & Brawer, 1987). Not only do community colleges invest resources in these programs, but there is evidence to show that the overall curriculum is affected, especially in terms of the literacy requirements, and difficulty of coursework and programs (Cohen & Brawer, 1987; Richardson, Fisk, & Okun, 1983).

In the community college in this study, high school students and home schooled students enrolling concurrently in college while completing high school requirements are also prevalent. At the time that I began this study and requested volunteers from various classrooms on campus, I was unaware of the number of high school students in many classes. Three of the students who volunteered were high school students during at least the first interview or within the previous three months. I soon realized that many instructors were also unaware of the number of high schoolers in their classrooms. Simmons has pointed out that, "Undeniably, most community colleges reflect the diversity of their immediate environs more than any other segment of higher education in America" (Simmons, 1994, p. 454).

Students and Class Structure

A sizable number of community college critics have pointed out that expanding the curriculum of community colleges to include vocational education, an addition that proceeded rapidly in the 1960's, has had the effect of replicating social inequalities within the class structure of the United States (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1987; Grubb, 1991; Karabel, 1972; Pincus, 1980). Brint and Karabel saw this change as being furthered by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, known as the Commission of Seven:

> The massive diversion of junior college students from college-transfer programs advocated by the members of the Commission of Seven - though justified by them primarily in terms of an ideology of "individual differences" - may thus also be viewed as an attempt to avoid the overproduction of professionals and managers.

> Writing in the midst of the Great Depression, the Carnegie panel could hardly have failed to notice the growing gap between individual aspirations for mobility and available job opportunities. Increasing the proportion of junior college students in terminal curricula - even if it relegated some unfortunate individuals into programs that did not tap their highest intellectual abilities - was central to their program for addressing this dilemma (p. 51).

These critics maintain that women, minorities and lower-economic level students who can not afford a university education or who have not received sufficient educational preparation are often funneled into programs at the community college level that lead to lower-paying jobs and lower social status. Others have agreed that this is a possibility worth studying, but that the diversity of students and the difficulty of measuring student aspirations make it nearly impossible to understand completely the impact of community college attendance on student progress. Cohen and Brawer (1989) have questioned whether it is within the realm of any educational system to overthrow the prevailing social structure, and, in any case, they consider community colleges to be "low influence" institutions in changing an individual student's aspirations. In fact, they point out that the critics of the community college system have made the mistake of studying groups rather than individuals, "But the critics' fundamental flaw is that *they have attempted to shift the meaning of educational equality from individual to group mobility*" (p. 352).

College Choice

High school students in the United States are faced with a complicated variety of choices for further education that includes public and private institutions, four-year universities and colleges, and two-year junior colleges and community colleges. Most of the research that explores how students eventually make a choice concentrates on the traditional-age student who enters a four-year college. Many of these studies document the typical middle-class student's path from junior high through college entry. I found that

these studies provide insight into how different the characteristics of the pre-entry four-year college student are from the pre-entry characteristics of the community college student.

Gilmore, Spiro, and Dolich, in a 1981 marketing study, found that choosing a college is a lengthy process. The decision to attend college is initially influenced primarily by the student's academic ability, as shown by higher grades and higher standardized test scores, and by socio-economic status. The marketing study shows that even before an active search, most students have some knowledge of a substantial number of colleges. The pre-college students then begin an inquiry about specific colleges by asking for information and applications, and some attend informational meetings. Students then complete and submit applications to at least two or three institutions. When the student receives the acceptance notices from some or all of these schools, the last step is to narrow the choice to one college.

In one of the largest studies done on college choice, Sanders (1990) reports that 400 sets of parents who requested information from Washington State University, and 800 high school pre-applicant seniors were surveyed because they were similar in characteristics to Washington State University's previous three freshmen classes in academic achievement, gender, ethnicity, income, and geographic distribution. The parents ranked teaching reputation, employment opportunities after graduation, specific programs, general university reputation, and college faculty reputation as their expectations from a college. The students' ranking of important characteristics was slightly different, listing employment opportunities after graduation, variety of courses, teaching reputation, specific programs, and cost as being the most important things to look for in a college

In other research generally, students report that a college's reputation, the diversity of its programs, and the ability of its graduates to get good jobs are the most important reasons for choosing a specific college (Canale, Dunlap, Britt, & Donohue, 1996; Dixon & Martin, 1991; The Chronicle of Higher Education, 1997; Trusheim, Crouse, &

Middaugh, 1990). The size and location of a college are other factors students cite, but they are considered less important than the previous factors.

In the context of this study, I think it is important to note that students begin this lengthy process of learning about and applying to colleges at the encouragement of their parents. A study of nearly 5,000 ninth graders conducted over a four year period showed that parental encouragement was the most important factor in causing white students to attend college, far more important than parental income, education, school activities, and the student's grade point average (Bouse & Hossler, 1991). It is also noteworthy that many of these studies show that a student's expectation of attending college is usually formed by the ninth grade.

Although research on college choice at the community college level is scarce, these students seem to select a college based on some of the same criteria as the students at larger institutions. A survey of 675 students at a small Alabama community college rated the following five factors out of 29 factors as the most important in their decision to attend their local two-year college:

1. overall quality of education
2. types of programs available
3. tuition and fees
4. overall reputation of the college
5. faculty qualifications

Seventy-eight percent of the students in this study were between 17 and 24 years of age (Absher & Crawford, 1996). One of the least important factors, in 28th place, was the advice of a high school counselor.

Research on student choice at the community college level is not totally comparable to research based on four-year colleges because most community colleges in the United States are not selective institutions. Community colleges generally maintain an open access

policy that allows all students with a high school diploma or a General Equivalency Diploma to enroll for classes that do not have prerequisites. So, for example, a student might apply to attend a local community college, go through an assessment process, and through the testing process be placed in a developmental reading or mathematics class that does not carry college degree credits. Once the student completes the necessary developmental classes successfully, he or she may then go on to enroll in college level courses. In evaluating a community college, I would maintain that a respondent does not necessary mean that community colleges have a good reputation in the sense of being a highly selective institution that offers courses in the most advanced or competitive fields. It is more likely that the student is referring to a local reputation for having teachers that are helpful and concerned, and a wide choice of courses that cover the beginning levels of occupational or liberal arts degree programs.

The College Experience

Once the student has chosen a college to attend, it becomes important to understand how the student decides to stay at the college until the completion of a degree, or decides to leave the college before graduating. Educational researchers have developed numerous models of retention or attrition to study and understand college students' experiences because the loss of students is higher education is costly, and might also indicate institutional problems. "The income from the retention of a full-time student can be measured in the tens of thousands of dollars" (Bean, 1990, p.147). Bean clarifies that the terms retention and attrition can be used interchangeably even though they have opposite meanings because they are in one-to-one correspondance with each other. "...hence, an attrition model is a retention model and vice versa..." (p. 147).

Retention Models

Bean, Pascarella, Spady, Tinto, and others have developed theoretical models of retention based on educational research and research in other social science areas (Bean,

1982). Two recent, widely used models are useful to this study because they cover a diversity of factors that influence college student retention; Bean's 10-variable causal model of the attrition process (Bean, 1982, p. 295), originally developed from empirical research conducted on employee turnover in industry, and Tinto's longitudinal model of institutional departure (Tinto, 1993, p. 114) developed from sociological and educational research.

Bean's model of the attrition process was developed from a quantitative, two-part study conducted at a midwestern university with 1, 574 students twenty-one years old or younger. This study included a large percentage of higher ability students as indicated by ACT scores, while the bottom quartile of ACT scores was underrepresented. The first part of the study included 23 variables, 13 of which were found to be insignificant to student attrition, including contacts with faculty, centralization, memberships in campus organizations, academic program competitive, absenteeism, likelihood of marrying, difficulty of financing school, and various other background variables such as parent's education and high school performance. In the second part of the study, the ten variables that were found to be important to student attrition in ranking from most important to least important were the following (p. 312):

1. Intent to leave
2. Grades
3. Opportunity to transfer
4. Practical value
5. Certainty of choice
6. Loyalty
7. Family approval
8. Courses
9. Student goals

10. Major and occupational certainty

Bean points out that these variables affect each other as well as the student's attrition. Although this model is helpful in many ways for creating a comprehensive picture of student attrition, I think that it is also an example of how difficult it is to apply research developed from four-year university studies to community college students. To begin with, when a student transfers to another college at the four-year level this represents attrition to a competitive university. It is somewhat more complicated for a community college. Although the community college administration and faculty would like to see a student complete a two-year degree before moving on to a university, it is generally statistically counted a success when a student transfers to a higher level of education, thus fulfilling the community college's mission of preparing students for transfer.

Also, research has shown that community college students have a different type of relationship with faculty members than do university students, a relationship that is important to the student's success at the institution and in the classroom (Elliott, 1992; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Richardson, 1992). Community college students are generally in smaller classes and have more opportunity to build a personal relationship with their teachers. "Students depended heavily on the support of faculty both in making themselves available outside of class and in expressing interest in students and their progress" (Elliott, 1992, p. 123). In Bean's model, the students' interactions with faculty members were not addressed other than faculty contacts which were found to be insignificant.

Another problem that I would point out with applying this model to the community college level is that grades, which ranked second in importance to attrition in Bean's model, are not as standardized for community college students. At the beginning of community college matriculation, students are often in developmental classes, which are generally graded on a pass/fail basis. Also, many developmental and upper level

instructors factor attendance into their grading system in an attempt to build habits that many students haven't previously developed. In the Bean model, absenteeism was not found to be a significant factor, a fairly obvious outcome when dealing with a homogeneous group of students that might have higher ability, a better understanding of the academic process, or greater motivation.

The most troubling concept in Bean's model is the notion that the prematriculation characteristics of the students were not significant factors in determining student persistance. These characteristics were eliminated in the first part of the study done in 1980 (Bean, 1980). So, for example, the difficulty of financing school was eliminated as insignificant in the first part of the study. The students that I interviewed at this rural community college also emphatically stated that they would not drop out of college for financial reasons, although eleven of the twelve students were on some type of assistance. At least one student eventually did leave college because she was unable to repay a $283.00 bill to the financial aid office. After extensive interviews discussing the students' jobs, home lives, and family situations, I thought that the students' declarations of intent were far more idealistic than realistic. They often cited the cost of textbooks, car upkeep, insurance, and other items, so it was apparent that they were concerned about financial issues. By stating that they would remain in college even if they did not receive financial aid, it seemed they wanted to express a determination to stay in school. In Bean's studies done at the university level, the high cost of tuition, books, and living away from home have already eliminated to some extent those students who have few financial resources. This not only means that the studies are done on a totally different type of student, but that the factors that affect attrition for these student groups are going to be different.

Tinto's model (Figure 1) is more generalized and open-ended than Bean's model, which is ideal for including the factors that develop from qualitative research. Tinto's model focuses on explaining why and how some students come to depart from their

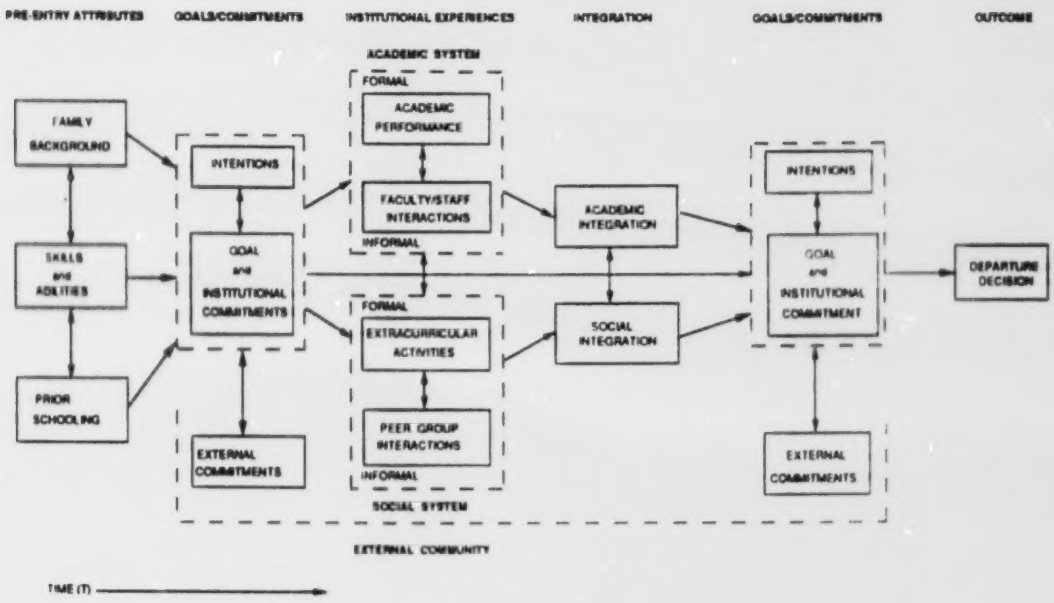
institution before completing a degree. The model is longitudinal and interactional in character which makes it easier to account for factors that develop over time, as well as factors that affect each other during the time before and after college entry. Tinto describes his model as both a descriptive and explanatory model so that the model:

> ... seeks to explain how interactions among different individuals within the academic and social systems of the institution and the communities which comprise them lead individuals of different characteristics to withdraw from that institution prior to degree completion (p.113).

Tinto's model specifies that students enter an educational institution with a variety of personal attributes that have an impact, along with many other factors, on the student's pathway through the institution. These personal attributes, family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling are categories broad enough to capture the characteristics of the very diverse community college population of students. I have chosen to use Tinto's longitudinal model as a theoretical framework to present the findings from this study because I was building a portrait of students who had recently chosen to attend a specific college. I wanted to focus on the influences, information, events, people, or personal characteristics that led up to their decision to attend the college. The pre-entry attributes in Tinto's model gave a structure to the data I compiled that led to a discussional theory about how students choose to attend a rural community college.

Figure 1

Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure



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To briefly follow-up on the students in this study once they had experienced at least one or two complete semesters at the community college, I also asked the students to evaluate their decision to attend the college. Tinto's model posits that the pre-entry characteristics of students affect their intentions and their goals, and their commitment to the college. These, combined with the experiences that the student has while in college, and the student's integration academically and socially, are all factors that lead to attritition or retention.

First Year Experiences

Once enrolled in a college and taking classes, students begin to make evaluations about their surroundings and the events that they encounter. They also begin to change in various ways. First generation students, in particular, often think that the changes in their speech, dress, goals, and ideas begin to separate them from their family members who have not attended college (London, 1992; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg & Jalomo, 1994; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella & Nora, 1996).

> Because of their family and educational backgrounds, going to college often constituted a significant and intimidating cultural transition for the first-generation students in our study. Attending and completing college carried the potential for radical changes in these students and the lives they led. Indeed, for many ...the decision to go to college was a conscious decision to escape the occupational dead-ends and hopelessness their life courses otherwise promised (Terenzini et al, 1994, p. 63)

For first generation students, and community college students are most often the first generation in their family to attend college, adjusting to college life is very difficult because they are not continuing a family tradition, but breaking it. These students with little background knowledge about college life have to learn ways to cope with the academic

requirements in reading and math, the size of the campus, the scheduling of classes, the lack of friends and family, and the financial responsibilities (Attinasi, 1986, Terenzini et al, 1996; Weissman, Bulakowski, & Jumisko, 1998). In general, the literature on first generation students is in agreement:

> Overall, the picture suggests these students come less well prepared and with more nonacademic demands on them, and they enter a world where they are less likely to experience many of the conditions that other research indicates are positively related to persistence, performance, and learning (Terenzini et al, 1996, p. 18).

The research on first year community college students shows that the adjustment to college life is a complex process and can be assisted in a variety of ways, some of which, such as orientation, should be started even before the student arrives at the college. Good teaching practices are of first importance, but faculty, staff, and administrators must also be aware of the differences in background characteristics of students and must be willing to take a personal interest in encouraging all students. A validating experience with a faculty member, staff member, or a peer during the early college enrollment is cited by many students as being important to their decision to stay at the college. Orientations should be provided for students and their parents to assist with integration into the academic and social life of the college, in-class and out-of-class activities must be provided to help students adjust to the college life, and academic support programs must be provided until the student is competitive within the academic system (Attinasi, 1986; Upcraft, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Terenzini et al, 1994; Terenzini et al, 1996; Weissman et al, 1998).

Students' classroom experiences and their relationships to faculty members are diverse in community colleges (Richardson, 1992; Weissman et al, 1998). Faculty members can create effective learning environments by engaging in teaching and student-related behaviors that appeal to the diverse population of students in their institutions.

Richardson (1992) categorizes faculty behaviors into eight groups including: outreach and student recruiting, mentoring and advising, academic support/learning assistance, campus climate, student assessment, good teaching practices, adaptive instruction, and emphasizing academic achievement. Richardson's study of community college teaching is positive, "The results generally support the view of community colleges as institutions with a special commitment to student learning."

However, within these categories there is considerable variation that is often linked to the culture of the institution:

> Where faculty members consistently reported higher levels of involvement in effective behaviors, institutions had a shared culture or at least a culture where faculty and administrative values did not conflict. The cultures of higher-ranking institutions were also consistent in the importance they attached to fostering high student achievement (p. 15)

Overall, of course, the experience with faculty members that changes students the most is the academic experience. "...graduates of community college score higher than incoming freshmen on a measure of general intellectual and analytic skills (Pascarelli & Terenzini, 1991, p. 155). All of this is not meant to say that adjusting to college is too difficult for the average student to accomodate or that attending a local community college is a life-shaking experience:

> College changes all student, whether first generation or not. Sophisticated and useful surveys have documented changes in students' psychological and ethical development, attitudes and beliefs of one kind or another, ability to think abstractly and critically, and so on. These changes have been attributed to exposure to the curriculum, continued maturation, "readiness" for college, the quality of teaching, as well as other factors. While some students experience a dramatic falling away of

> scales from the eyes so that the world is seen anew, for most students changes are more modest and incremental (London, 1992, p.10).

Student Transfer

Statistically, traditional-age students are the age group of students most interested in attending a community college to prepare for transfer to a bacculaureate institution. In some national data, the aspirations of nearly half of entering community college students who were within one year of high school graduation included obtaining a four-year degree (Grubb, 1991). But accurately assessing the goals of students is difficult, and the research in this area is often conflicting. There are differences between full- and part-time students, and between liberal arts and occupational students, although in many occupational areas such as nursing, students are required to complete a substantial number of liberal arts classes before applying to the nursing program. It is also difficult to compare data from colleges because they acquire information in various ways:

> The form of the question asking transfer intentions also biases the answers. The question is usually asked as "What is the highest academic degree you intend to obtain?" That suggests a goal to be reached sometime during the person's life. Few young people would acknowledge that they never expect to go further in the educational system: it is neither personally nor socially acceptable for them to admit that they have closed off life's options. When the question is changed to "What is the primary reason you are attending this college at this time?", significantly fewer, usually one-third, say that they are in college to prepare for transfer, while one-half say they they are in college to gain occupational skills. Most of the latter group also expect eventually to gain higher degrees but see job entry as their first aim. In fact, many students mark both "bachelor's" as the highest degree they expect to obtain and "gaining occupational skills" as their primary reason for attending. They may

need the bachelor's degree to enter the occupational field to which they aspire, so that their responses are perfectly consistent. (Cohen and Brawer, 1987, p. 95).

The transfer function of community colleges is important for several reasons. It maintains the reputation of the community college as offering courses equivalent to the first two years of universities, and it confirms the importance of the community college within the educational system as providing access to the widest possible span of the general population. I think this is an important consideration because community colleges provide access to higher education for a high percentage of minority students and students from low income families. But measuring transfer success on a national basis has been very difficult, "Transfer education is one of the most important, most criticized, and most difficult to measure of the functions performed by community colleges" (McIntyre, 1987, p. 142).

Grubb's 1991 research using the National Longitudinal Study of the Class of 1972, and the High School and Beyond Study, which compiled data on the high school class of 1980, showed that the overall transfer rate of community college students declined between the class of 1972 and the class of 1980. At the same time, this was accompanied by an increase in number of students who were enrolling in vocational degree and certificate programs at the community college level as opposed to a transfer program.

McIntyre (1987), using data compiled for the state of California and a greater variety of factors such as cost, level of unemployment, the military draft, and changes in admissions quotas, found that transfer rates have remained fairly steady:

> Thus, our results do not support the argument that there has been a substantial deterioration in the community colleges' transfer program. Rather, it appears that changing numbers of high school graduates, which led to changes in the full-time enrollment at the community colleges have been the major cause of changes in the numbers of community college transfers (pp. 153-154).

McIntyre's study also found that unemployment affected the number of students who enroll in community college and their subsequent decisions regarding transfer, and that the cost of the tuition at the receiving four-year college also had an impact on transfer rates.

Although these two studies are not necessarily in total disagreement, the McIntyre study does seem to posit that multiple factors in the student's environment, without regard to the community college programs, are powerful contributors to the decisions that students make about transferring. Nora and Rendon (1990), in a qualitative study using Tinto's Model, also found that students who had high levels of social and academic integration at the community college level tended to have high levels of predisposition to transfer.

Overall, it is estimated that the transfer rate of students from the community college level to the four year college level is between 20 and 29 percent (Eaton, 1994; Knoell, 1994). This is also a statistic that might be dramatically different at different institutions or vary between state educational systems. Importantly, once students do transfer, the research has shown that they are generally as successful in grade point averages and graduation rates as students who began their matriculation at the four-year college (Cohen & Brawer, 1987).

The Rural United States

Researchers have noted many common misconceptions about rural areas in the United States. First is the belief that rural Americans are farmers, and yet less than 10 percent of rural residents live on farms, less than 20 percent make their living from farm related work (Gollattscheck, 1992). Many rural residents, like the families of the participants in this study, make their living from small and moderate sized industry, local businesses, and tourism. These are occupations that are affected by the ups and downs of national and state economies. Financial and social change have become the staple of rural life as small businesses open and close, retirees move into former agricultural areas, and

small opportunistic industries relocate from one community to another (Friedel & Lapin, 1995).

In general, rural areas seem to have characteristics that can be loosely grouped under problems with their limited economies, and problems associated with geographic isolation:

> The problems facing the rural United States in the mid-1990's are many: poverty, illiteracy, a graying population, dying small towns, a shortage of trained workers, substandard housing, high unemployment, above-average school drop-out rates, substance abuse, and lack of adequate health care and child care (Vineyard, 1993).

Many of these specific problems resemble the characteristics of the inner cities of the United States more than the close neighbors of rural areas, the suburbs and small towns:

> Rural areas in the U.S. suffer from chronic poverty and rural families are twice as likely to live below the U.S. poverty level even when one or both parents in the family are working (ERIC Clearinghouse).

The ability of a government entity or an educational institution to economically develop these areas might be more difficult than developing urban areas because less is known about rural development, and many problems are historically entrenched. The majority of this poverty is not caused by the characteristics of the individual, but by the economic structure of rural types of industries. Jobs in rural areas are low-paying because they require few skills, and many are part-time or seasonal (Commission on Small/Rural Community Colleges, 1987).

Children raised in rural families feel that their parents are more apt to encourage finding a full-time job, attending a trade school, or going into the military rather than attending college. These are typical aspirations of families with low incomes in almost any geographic area of the United States. However, students growing up in rural areas are

also much less likely to have a college-educated parent (Haas, 1992). Students who stay in rural areas after graduation from high school have the lowest educational aspirations of any student population in the United States (Cobb, McIntire, & Pratt, 1990).

To understand the rural area in this study, I have found it helpful to explore the various definitions used in research of the term rural. Rios cites over seven definitions of rural used by policy makers and researchers ranging from the specific quantitative parameters previously used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census to qualitative definitions that take into consideration such attributes as persistent poverty, cultural values, and political structures (Rios, 1988). The U.S. Bureau of the Census has abandoned quantitative definitions of rural and concentrates on defining urban areas by population, and refers to the remaining areas as nonmetropolitan.

These definitions are further complicated by the need for state legislatures, educational districts, and colleges to classify students educated in rural areas in order to justify offering financial assistance or specific educational programs for their rural populations. These localized definitions show almost no consistency. They are attempts to comprehend and standardize our notions about rural areas and their educational problems. They don't work nationally, and they don't lead to coherent research findings because they often assume that most rural areas are agricultural, poor, and socially cohesive (Edington and Koehler, 1987). This neighborly-but-poor farm model of rural education is a basic assumption when comparing urban to rural student even though it is always assumed that urban students are diverse socially, economically, and racially:

> "It is not, however, usually recognized that rural students also are far from uniform and include the children of Black sharecroppers, Appalachian mountaineers, Hispanic migrants, reservation American Indians, Kansas wheat farmers, relocated urbanites, and many others." (Edington & Koehler, 1987).

Rios points out, that "People know when they are rural." When I began this exploratory study, I thought that living in an isolated, high desert area must be an important part of the lives of the students I wanted to study. To understand this unique environment, the definition I found most accurate and meaningful is the federal lands county category first defined in an Agriculture and Rural Economics Division report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Bender et al, 1985). This report divides rural areas into seven categories, each having distinct characteristics. The federal lands counties category includes the county in this study. It is a category developed to closely identify the unique characteristics of many western states. The federal lands counties tend to have the following characteristics:

- Remoteness from large metro areas,
- People who tend to reside in small towns and cities rather than in the open country,
- Rapid population increases,
- Average proportions of income from services-producing activities even though population density is very low, and
- Large farms and ranches.

The geographic area surrounding the college in this study fits these characteristics very closely, especially its distinctive feature of population distribution. In the county under study, the overall population density is very low even for a rural area, but a sizable percentage of the population is clustered into three small towns.

Bender et al (1985) also point out that the 247 federal lands counties are typical of the western states and overlap with the retirement counties category. Several counties located in Arizona show a net immigration of people aged 60 and over that equaled 15 percent or more of the total population. They share the characteristics of federal lands counties of having high growth rates, remote rural locations, and larger services-producing

economic sectors than would be expected in a rural area. These characteristics are important to account for because they create a statistically high income level for local areas, when in fact, there are disparities between the income of the senior population and the younger population.

Rural Community Colleges and Their Students

The Task Force on Rural Community Colleges established by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges in 1976 defines the rural community college as one which is regarded as rural by its own leadership. The Task Force developed defining guidelines that include institutions that are publicly supported, located in centers of population under 100,000, provide a comprehensive curriculum, and serve a large geographic area (Vineyard, 1979). More than half of the members of the AACC consider themselves to be representatives of small/rural institutions. The full-time student population served by rural community colleges is estimated to be over a half-million.

Research on these institutions was scarce until the 1970's, "The journals are almost as silent as if this vast sector of higher education did not exist" (Vineyard, 1979). In 1987, DeYoung pointed out that some research does exist on rural elementary and secondary education, but it is often "in-house" research pertaining to specific states or advocacy issues. Some of the most thorough ethnographic studies have been done in rural communities in the Carolinas and with Amish schools:

> In each of these accounts, community identity, interaction patterns, and cultural meanings outside of the public school were argued to be essential to understanding the cognitive and affective outcomes of schooling for the different populations involved. That is, educational ethnographies previously done in rural settings have almost invariably suggested that understanding the community context(s) of schooling is indispensable for analysis of educational process and success in nonmetropolitan environments (DeYoung, 1987).

These studies emphasize that the rural areas of the United States are complex and diverse, and so are the students who attend school in these areas. The diversity of the students even at the elementary and secondary level make generalizing educational research difficult.

One area of research, however, does seem to show similarities, and that is the research on the economies of rural institutions. Rural community colleges do not enjoy the benefits of the economy of size that urban institutions do (DeYoung, 1987). Smaller community populations result in smaller class size while the institution attempts to offer the comprehensive curriculum of a larger institution. Rural community colleges often face the diverse educational needs of the local population with a minimum of economic support. Many states recognize this and have funding formulas to assist rural institutions, but programs are still affected by the need to economize while offering effective, competitive programs.

In urban areas, the local population has a greater choice of educational options, as well as community services such as job training programs within industries or individual corporations, technical assistance from city sponsored programs, and federal programs aimed at large populations. Rural community colleges, however, often provide the only higher education within a 50 to 100 mile radius. And location is of paramount importance to providing access to rural students. In fact, enrollment in community colleges is highest among students within a fifteen mile radius of a campus, and declines proportionally until it is almost non-existent at fifty miles (Vineyard, 1979). Also, rural community colleges generally provide the only source of economic development and cultural enrichment for their communities, activities that are shared by many institutions in cities. (Cavan, 1995).

This is not to say that rural community colleges are overwhelmed with the needs of the community. In fact, these colleges respond rapidly to educational demands and have found their niche in the higher education system. Their geographic location, their growing

populations, and their ability to provide training for the computer and technology jobs that are emerging in every sector of American life is putting rural community colleges in a key position for assuming leadership roles in their communities and in education in the United States (Valadez and Killacky, 1995).

Very little research has been done on students in rural community colleges as a separate group, but understanding rural students in the public schools gives some insight into the community college population. Many researchers find that secondary education in small or rural schools is comparable to the level of education in urban schools, although smaller high schools have significantly fewer art, data processing, calculus, psychology, sociology, and advanced placement offerings. In general, rural students do as well as urban students in higher education, have similar aspirations and similar college grade point averages (Edington and Koehler, 1987). Research does indicate, however, that rural students have less access to information about higher education.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter Three describes the qualitative research methods I use in this study to create a portrait of the traditional age students at a rural community college. It also explains using interviews as a grounded theory approach to collecting data. It then describes the design features that I developed to fit the specific setting and the participants under study, and explains the procedures used to analyze the data.

Qualitative Research

I chose a qualitative methodology for this study because I wanted to build a well-grounded, rich description from each participant regarding the decision to attend a rural community college. Qualitative research collects data on a phenomenon, in this case the act of choosing to attend a community college, and, according to Smith (1987), "organizes them, holds them against ideas, hypotheses, and categorical definitions as a way of testing them."

I also wanted to explore the events and influences in the participants' homes, their high schools, and their ongoing social lives that might have contributed to their decision. Qualitative research is devised to explore these contexts. Smith also states:
What sets qualitative research apart most clearly from other forms of research is the belief that the particular physical, historical, material, and social environment in which people find themselves has a great bearing on what they think and how they act (p. 175). DeYoung (1987) has pointed out that exploring the context of students' lives is especially important to understanding rural students.

My initial research question was to ask why a student would chose to attend a small rural community college. Although this seems like a simple question, it could potentially have many layers of answers, especially if one assumes that any student in the

U.S. can attend any one of numerous, diverse institutions. The surface level answer to this question has been addressed by research surveys that collect information on student aspirations, educational attainment, retention, and school satisfaction levels. But surveys do not allow the student to explain in their own words what the circumstances in their lives were when they choose to attend a specific college, and what criteria they used to make this decision. Miles and Huberman (1984) state that, "With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, assess local causality, and derive fruitful explanations."

I anticipated before doing this study that the chronology of the participants' high school years would be important to understanding their decisions and, in fact, the research of Gilmore et al. (1981) and others has shown that many students follow a lengthy sequence of events that lead to choosing a college. I also assumed that parents and peers would influence this decision on a regular basis throughout the year or two before college attendance, especially because in a rural area that has only one high school and one local college, the pool of available sources of information would be smaller. Qualitative research using open-ended questions could generate rich descriptions of the participants' high school years, discussions with family and friends about going to college, the other events in the decison making process, and the subsequent evaluation of this process.

I was also interested in knowing how the students evaluated their decision as the first year unfolded successfully or unsuccessfully. It was my assumption that the participants, like almost anyone, would be able to describe their thinking in retrospect better than at the immediate time they were making the decision to attend college.

I think that using qualitative methodology is important for another reason as well. The educational community as a whole has seen the community college as a safety net for students who can not afford a university education or who need to improve their grades or academic skills before moving on to a university. Cohen and Brawer (1989) offer an

explanation of the growth of community colleges based predominantely on statistical information:

> The increase in community college enrollments may be atttributed to several conditions in addition to general population expansion: older students' participation; physical accessibility; financial aid; part-time attendance; the reclassification of institutions; the redefinition of students and courses; and high attendance by low-ability, women, and minority students (p. 31)

Although these are accurate assessments of the students of community colleges in general, it is not clear that they are accurate portrayals of traditional-age students in rural community colleges. In fact, Cohen (1996) has argued that the level of research should be at the individual college under study, "But one who would understand college outcomes should look to the single college as the unit of analysis."

Qualitative data has the potential to "go beyond initial preconceptions and frameworks" (Miles and Huberman, 1984). In the last thirty years, students from all levels of economic background have attended colleges, community colleges, and universities in ever-increasing numbers. Federal financial aid since the late 1960's has allowed students a wide choice of institutions to attend, but more high school graduates are now choosing to start their college careers at a two-year college than at the university level. Also, in that same time frame, universities have instituted programs to assist underprepared students. Writing labs, tutoring, and reading classes are now established at many four-year colleges, but they apparently have not diluted the appeal of the community college. So why do some high school students in a rural area choose to stay in the local area instead of moving away to the larger universities in the big cities? This study asks twelve of those students that question.

Grounded Theory

Within this qualitative framework, I have relied on Grounded Theory as a method to pursue the research. This method, originally explicated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in the The Discovery of Grounded Theory, stresses the importance of inductive discovery to the research process. By grounding the theory in the data that is collected, which in this case is the participants' responses to questions in the interviews, the generated theory is less distorted by the intervening influence of the researcher. Also, the theory is less apt to be a conclusion that is tacked on to the end of the data collection as an attempt to generalize the findings to other situations or to all situations. In this study, it was very important to have the theory emerge from the data because I was not trying to generalize the data at all, but only use it to assist in helping create a portrait of twelve students at one particular college.

Interviews as Grounded Theory

In grounded theory, it is assumed that the participant's perspective is unknown to the researcher before the study is conducted, and only by asking questions and allowing the participant to follow his or her own train of thought can a fairly accurate understanding of the participant's perspective be made known. For example, one participant was intensely interested in rock music videos. This topic may not seem relevent to the data analyzed in quantitative studies about student college choices. In this case, however, it became evident that not only was the student's interest in music leading her to an unusual career choice, but it was also an important factor in coping with a disastrous high school and post-high school life situation, and her resulting decision to attend a local community college.

Choosing a college is a major decision in a young person's life that requires weighing many life factors and alternate possiblities. In the case of the traditional- age

student, it means that a student who is somewhere between seventeen and twenty-four years old must consider financial obligations, academic programs and degrees, future career options and how they are affected by academic requirements, and a multitude of personal and family considerations. Many students this young have limited or no experience reflecting on these issues or even discussing them with accuracy, and even less experience understanding the multiple influences in their lives that led to specific decisions. Qualitative research is designed to address the difficulties involved in exploring students' college choice. "When the questions for which data are sought are likely to cause the respondent greater difficulty and imprecision, the broader, more flexible net provided by qualitative techniques is appropriate" (McCracken, 1988).

Design Features

In this study, I constructed a portrait of the rural student by using long interviews to explore student perceptions of their college choice. I developed a list of forty questions that covered four specific areas: general information about the student's personal and family situation; the student's high school background and previous plans for college; job experience and financial aid status; and general reaction to the college (Appendixes A, B, C, and D). The early questions elicited specific information about the student, but later questions were open-ended in the hopes that the student would give long, informative descriptions of their decision-making process. McCracken (1988) points out that "Qualitative methods are most useful and powerful when they are used to discover how the respondent sees the world." To encourage lengthy descriptions and to put the participants at ease, the interviews were very conversational in tone (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). By using an informal approach in the interviews, the responses were fairly close to the normal tone and thought processes of the participant. In most cases, I left the formal sequence of questions to pursue areas that the participants indicated were important to them. The extended interviews elicited a detailed profile of

each student who chose to attend this college, and also explored the characteristics of the college that appealed to the student.

The interviews consisted of both open-ended and closed questions to elicit information from the participants (Pelto and Pelto, 1978). The closed questions gave me introductory information about each student, such as age, the number of credits being taken each semester, and the degree or certificate program being pursued. They also allowed the students to relax into a conversational attitude as they reflected on the current semester. The open-ended questions often had to do with a student's perspective on the college: for example, I asked participants to compare college classes to high school classes, or to describe anything that was surprising about the first semester of college (Spradley, 1979). Many of the open-ended questions followed up subjects that the student had introduced. If a student began talking about changing high schools, I asked why the family had moved so many times, or if it was difficult for the student to start attending a new school.

I wrote the interviews to include repeated questions for several reasons. The most important reason was that the students sometime answered questions quickly and without reflection. Returning to the same question in a slightly different format gave me a chance to explore the issue again. Students often forgot or dismissed incidents that were important to their decision-making process, but after repeated questioning, they began to give more descriptive, more meaningful information that included specific examples of events or thoughts that had influenced their decisions.

Another reason I repeated questions was that students often didn't characterize a situation in the same language that I did. Accidentally imposing language on a participant can distort the collected information (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This was especially true when I asked students if they had visited the campus before enrolling in classes. "To visit" a campus is a common term among college workers. Students generally replied that

they had not. On further questioning, several students mentioned that they had "come out to the campus to walk around and stuff." Apparently "walking around" was not the same activity as "visiting."

Another important reason to repeat some questions was that participants often had contradictory, confused, or vague notions of how they arrived at their choice of colleges. One student hurriedly answered questions in the first interviews and later gave long, descriptive answers that were the exact opposite to her first responses. She originally said that her high school friends were not interested in going to college, and that she did not know anyone who went away to school. She later recalled that one of her friends went away to attend the Naval Academy, which she dismissed as being "a different experience." And she also later discussed how all her friends had talked about college, but they wanted to go to Arizona State University or the University of Arizona and live in a dormitory. Participants are not necessarily in the habit of reflecting on the connection between the choices they have made in life, and the people and events that might have influenced those choices.

I began writing memos (Appendix E) at the beginning of the interviews to understand and analyze the interviewing process, and to begin exploring various ideas that were elicited from students or that occurred to me during reflection on the data. The interviews and the memos generated data that was analyzed using descriptive coding and the constant comparative method. As part of the memoing process, I also began developing a chronology for each student's experiences before they entered the college. This originally helped keep the collected data sorted by participant, but came to be an important analytical tool because the chronologies showed a repeated theme of school and life disruptions across participants' data.

To ensure that the interviews were inductive, I did not complete an extensive literature search before conducting the interviews. By collecting data through

interviewing students and generating theory out of this data, the theory is relevant to the data and is able to explain the behavior under study (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I did not want to prove through the interviews that any conceptions about college choice were accurate or inaccurate. In this study, I wanted to discover what possible, and currently unknown, events and influences were in the students' backgrounds that might have been influential in their decision. I wanted to approach the students in the context of the college setting and ask them how they decided to enroll in this specific institution. However, because I needed purposeful questions to begin interviewing participants, I did some brief preliminary reading in certain areas of college choice such as college location, faculty reputation, and family recommendations. I decided these were appropriate topics to begin exploring in the interviews. A post-review of the literature on rural communities, rural education, student characteristics, and student perceptions of college was used to further explore issues which first appeared in the interviews.

At the beginning of the study, I did not rely on any theoretical framework to form the data I would later collect in the interviews. Rather, I began interviewing the students and transcribing the interviews within a short period of time. I continued to conduct interviews, while reading and analyzing the earlier interviews during the same time period, a typical grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As I read the data, I began to observe that the event of "relocation" came up several times in the initial interviews. Consequently, I began to add more questions to the interviews about the students' adjustment to new schools and communities. I also began to request additional interviews with students to verify the importance of some of the information I had collected.

From the interview data and from my memos, I began developing codes (Appendix F) to separate the information across interviews rather than within interviews. These codes were developed using the constant comparative method and were

descriptive, using phrases to capture chunks of information from the interviews. Since I was working with over five hundred pages of transcribed interviews, and since the interviews were conversational and wide-ranging, 98 codes emerged from the data.

The constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for coding data has four stages: first, it codes data by comparing incidents and putting them into as many categories for analysis as possible; secondly, it integrates categories and their properties as part of the analysis; third, it delimits the theory so that there is a limit to the characteristics of incidents in one code, and it also makes the theory being developed broader so that it fits a wide range of situations; finally, it entails writing a theory that is a reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied.

It soon became obvious that family encouragement, familiy relocations, and family financial problems were major influences in the lives of the students that affected their ability to accumulate an education and develop their academic skills. At this point, I began using the pre-entry attributes section of Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure as a theoretical framework to reduce and limit the codes into concepts about the students' experiences. This is the result of using the constant comparative method. "As the theory grows, becomes reduced, and increasingly works better for ordering a mass of qualitative data, the analyst becomes committed to it" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As a framework, it fit the data because it contains the categories of family background, student's skills and abilities, and prior schooling. It stresses the importance of how family background affects the student's skills and abilities, and his or her prior schooling, which I was already seeing in the coding. In Tinto's model these three areas are considered pre-entry attributes that affect the student's interaction with the college.

This model was not used to predict that these students would depart from the college. It was used because the broad categories captured the importance of the influences and events in the student's lives; for example, Tinto's category, prior

schooling, was broad enough to cover student academic experiences from starting college while in high school, to problems with high school personnel, to dropping out of high school. In this way, I was able to group the descriptive codes into more analytical categories. As I continued to interview students over their first year of attendance, I extended these three concepts to include two more: personal issues, which covered characteristics that I thought were very individual to the participant being interviewed, and academic comfort which covered the variety of participants' responses to the college during their first year. By using the participants' words and Tinto's framework, I was able to build a "discussional" theory about how students' choose a rural community college (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Strauss, 1987).

Another analytical procedure that I used to assist in understanding the wealth of data collected, was building chronologies of student's lives. Although I could not possibly know every event that influenced each participant in their pre-college life, there were certain events such as multiple relocations, and leaving and re-entering schools, that were important events but which were difficult to organize. The final analytical procedure used was organizing, choosing the quotations to be used, and writing this study. "Writing and presenting findings from interview data is itself an analytically active enterprise. Rather than simply letting the data 'speak for themselves,' the active analyst empirically documents the meaning-making process" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The Setting

I conducted this study at a community college in northern Arizona. This college has four campuses and a district office providing educational services to one of the geographically largest counties of the United States. All four campuses are in towns of less than 30,000 people, but each town has a distinctly different character. The district offices and the largest campus, the campus used in this study, are located in an historic

ranching town. This section will provide a brief description of those characteristics of the population that became important factors in the study.

Arizona

Arizona has aproximately 4 million citizens, more than a million of whom have moved to this state in the last twenty years (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1994). It is rural in the sense of being scarcely populated in relation to its geographic area, but only 1.4 percent of personal income in the state is from farming. The population is continuing to grow, and the three public universities are expanding. Ten counties in Arizona have a community college, and more than 52 percent of college beginners take their first classes at one of these public community colleges.

Most of the counties in Arizona fit the Department of Agriculture's designation of a federal lands counties except for the two urban areas of Phoenix and Tucson. These two areas account for over 3 million of the population of Arizona. Although the urban areas show the most dramatic increases in population, most of the rural counties have also seen an increase in population from inmigration.

The community colleges are governed by the State Board of Directors for Community College of Arizona which has 17 members. The members include a representative from each of Arizona's 15 counties, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and a member designated from the Board of Regents.

At the county level, local boards have a membership of five elected representatives who serve six-year terms and are responsible, among other duties, for the general oversight of each campus including its curriculum, management, conditions, and needs. They also appoint the president and all other faculty and staff, set salaries, award degrees and certificates, and administer trusts and gifts received by the district.

Arizona has the 13th highest poverty rate in the United States with 15.7 percent of its citizens living below the poverty level (U.S. Census data reported by Arizona

Community Action Association). Unfortunately, 22 percent of the children under 18 in Arizona live below the poverty level.

The County

The college in this study is located in a rural county in Northern Arizona that has a population of 125,000 citizens, with approximately 8 people per square mile (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1994). Even though the population is sparse, it represents phenomenal growth; in 1980, this county had only 55,865 citizens (Arizona Department of Commerce, 1993). Most of the county's population is concentrated in three small cities, the only incorporated cities in the county. Over 90 percent of county land is open range administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

More than 95 percent of the county population is white, with Native Americans and people of Hispanic origin making up most of the remaining 5 percent. The largest segment of the population, 14. 2 percent, are citizens between 65 to 74 years old. Young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 make up less than 7 percent of the county population. In the last U.S. census, 14.2 percent of the population of this county lived below the poverty level in 1989, and this increase in poverty was significantly larger than the overall rate of growth in population (Arizona Community Action Association, 1995). Poverty rates are highest in the population under 18 years of age.

Typical of rural areas in the U.S., not only is the poverty level high in these areas, but the rate of people living in the lowest levels of poverty is exceptionally high. In this county, more than 40 percent of the poor are classified *very poor*, with incomes of less than 50 percent of the poverty threshold established by the U.S. government. More than 40 percent of the households led by single mothers lived below the poverty level (ACAA, 1995). This is significant to the community college because 61 percent of its population is female (High Desert Annual Retention and Tracking Report, 1996-1997). Also, many students attending the college are from single parent families.

The City

The campus in this study was chosen because it is the most typically rural of the four campuses in this college system. It it located in a city of 15,000 that is currently showing steady growth and has a diverse economy based on light and medium industry, tourism, and ranching (Arizona Department of Commerce, 1993). Two unincorporated areas surrounding the city have a population just slightly smaller than the incorporated city. During the recession in California in the early 1990's, the city experienced an in-migration that slowly expanded its economy and its school population.

The city has two high schools, an older building that is used to house the ninth grade students, and a large, newer campus that houses grades ten through twelve. The dropout rate for the upper level high school was over 11 percent for 1996-97, and just over nine percent for 1997-98. These rates compare favorably to the state high school dropout rate of over twelve percent, and is attributed by the high school administration to the introduction of the trimester system. The high school is located approximately two miles from the community college and participates in a number of joint activities with the college, including TechPrep, a program that brings college occupational classes to the high school, and Senior Day, a day long program at the college to introduce faculty members and academic programs to visiting high school seniors.

The College

Over 9,000 students are enrolled in the community college in this study, and they are predominantly older, white, part-time students. The average age of students is 39 years old. The full-time student equivalent for the four campuses is just over 2,000 (Annual Retention and Tracking Report, 1996-1997). The full-time student enrollment for the campus in this study was 508 for 1994, with less than 20 percent of the student population younger than 25 years old. In the fall of 1996 and the spring of 1997, 307

high school seniors graduated from the city's high school, and 155 of these graduates went on to enroll for at least one class at the community college; this continuation rate compares favorably to other community colleges. Also, during spring of 1997, 73 high school students were concurrently enrolled in the community college, taking a total of 172 courses at this campus (High Desert Student Retention and Outcomes, 1997).

Before enrolling for classes, all students must complete the ASSET Placement test, used frequently by community colleges in the United States. This assessment places nearly half of all incoming students into a developmental reading or grammar class, and about 80 percent into developmental math classes. The ASSET also compiles information regarding student educational plans showing that 32 percent of the students plan to complete a two-year degree, 29 percent plan to complete a four-year degree, and 20 percent plan to complete a certificate. Generally, over 13 percent of incoming students are already planning on completing a graduate degree.

At the time of this study, the college offered the three degrees recommended by the American Association of Community Colleges, the Associate of Arts, the Associate of Science, and the Associate of Applied Science. These degrees are currently undergoing statewide changes that will take effect in the fall, 1999. The largest programs on the campus are the Registered Nurse Associate degree, and the Liberal Arts Associate degree, although there are substantial enrollments in multiple certificate programs in areas such as administrative office technology and computer information systems programs. Transfer rates to the three universities in Arizona have not been available on a regular basis, but approximately 250 graduates of this community college were enrolled at either Arizona State University or Northern Arizona University during the fall of 1994.

Three of the campuses of this community college have a Northern Arizona University extension site located on campus. NAU has made an extensive commitment to rural areas in Arizona and has sites throughout the state on community college campuses.

At the campus in this study, students can complete a bachelor's degree in nine academic areas by completing two years at the community college and two at the NAU extension. Three of these areas, nursing, elementary education, and social work are degrees that have been popular at the community college level for over twenty years, and yet an environmental scan of the community has shown that few local residents know that students can complete an bachelor's degree on this campus. The extension site also offers two Master's level programs, and has plans for more facilities and academic programs over the next ten years.

Research Procedures

The following section details the procedures that I used to solicit student participants, conduct interviews, record, transcribe, and analyze data. These interviews were conducted between the fall of 1997 and the spring of 1999 with twelve students between the ages of 17 and 25 who intended to complete a degree or certificate program. All of the student were white; most were enrolled fulltime, although students recruited during the summer session were carrying only three or six credits due to the compressed schedule of courses. The three students who had disabilities also maintained fewer credits. The participants in the study included nine females, and three males, all of whom were single.

Student Volunteers

Beginning in the fall of 1997, I selected several classes at the college to request volunteers for the study. Since I had to rely on students volunteering to participate, this is not based on a random sample. It is a purposeful sample of students within the 17 to 24 year old age group, and specifically students who were interested in completing a college degree or certificate. In an attempt to find a variety of students, I requested volunteers from several different venues. I solicited participants by reading a script (Appendix G) in

two of my developmental reading classes, two developmental English classes, and two Psychology 101 classes.

I also solicited students from among my advisees. This group was targeted for two reasons: I found that students who knew me from previous contacts were more likely to volunteer and were more comfortable talking openly with me; also, it became obvious after the first six months of the study that male students were not volunteering from the classroom solicitations. I was able to recruit three male students by approaching advisees on an individual basis.

Students were solicited in all three college semesters. Fall attendees are generally younger students who are recent high school graduates. Also, during the summer session, every high school junior and graduating senior from the local high school is offered a tuition scholarship called Early Start for the equivalent of seven credit hours. Many high school students take advantage of this scholarship; consequently, the summer session classes have the highest percentage of students between the ages of 17 and 19. It is also assumed that this initial offer to take a college class during or immediately after high school may be a major factor in encouraging younger students to choose to attend this college the following fall, and I wanted to explore this possibility.

Interviews

Students who volunteered to participate in the study had to sign a consent form that explained the purpose and procedure of the interview process (Appendix H). During the first interview with each participant, I explained the process in greater depth, especially the need for tape-recording the interviews, and I encouraged the students to ask questions at any time, or to end the interview if they wished. All of the initial interviews were conducted in person. Some later interviews were conducted over the telephone. These procedures were approved by the Human Research Board at Arizona State University.

I originally tried to format each interview to be fairly brief so that students would not be reluctant to volunteer for a lengthy appointment. I devised a list of forty questions divided into four interviews, the interviews spread over a two semester period. In this way, I could promise to make only a brief interruption of the student's time, especially appealing to students who were on campus for only short periods of time. It soon became apparent that students were difficult to reach to make appointments, and then often missed the scheduled interview time. Once the students were in an interview, however, they were comfortable talking for as much as forty minutes to an hour. For these reasons, the first and second interviews were often combined, and the third and fourth interviews were combined when the student seemed responsive and eager to continue talking. I continued to refer to the questions as part of a set of four interviews because each of the ten questions covered a related topic.

Three students who completed the initial two interviews did not return to the college the following semester, and I was unable to reach them to complete the sequence. However, I think the two interviews that they completed were important, and I have included them in the study. Also, a student who successfully completed her Nurse Assistant Certificate left the area before I was able to conduct the last two interviews, and her data was included in the analysis as well. With five students, I was able to conduct a brief fifth interview in the year following the end of the interview cycle: these are the only interviews that were not tape-recorded.

Interviews were conducted at the student's convenience in my office at the campus, or in an available classroom. Several of the last interviews were conducted and recorded over the telephone. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed during 1997 through 1999.

Anonymity

No student's name or identifiable initials were used during this process. Tapes were organized by code initials and destroyed as soon as the interviews were transcribed. It is extremely important that the anonymity of these participants be maintained for several reasons: besides discussing their personal lives in detail, several of these students discuss their involvement with drugs, their medical histories, and major problems such as car accidents and incarcerations; also since several of the participants progressed to holding responsible and highly visible positions on campus, it became imperative not to identify the college, the city, or the county involved in the study. Consequently, I have alphabetized the participants by pseudonym to make it easier to discuss their histories, and where I have referred to the college, I have used the pseudonym, High Desert Community College. Since I have used statistical material provided by the community college in this study, readers who are interested in the original data must contact me for access to those materials.

Documentation

I had originally planned to augment the interviews by collecting data on each students's grade point average in high school and in the first year of college. I eventually decided against this for both practical and philosophical reasons. On a practical level it was obvious during the recruitment process that students were concerned about privacy issues, and also many lacked confidence about their academic skills. In the various classrooms and other settings where I recruited students, I approached over 90 students, but only twelve students volunteered to participate in the study. I think this low number shows a reluctance to share personal experiences and information, more than a concern about the time commitment involved in being interviewed.

Also, several of the students had not attended high school since ninth or tenth grade and did not have high school transcripts. Several students had changed high schools frequently and complained of high schools accepting and rejecting credits erractically. One student had not yet graduated and was taking as many classes at the college as she was at the high school. Another student had graduated from a high school in Chicago through a special education program for students with severe learning disabilities. For all of these reasons it did not seem that high school transcripts would provide enough information about students that was accurate or comparable across the diversity of student academic experiences.

More importantly, grades have never been a criteria used by the community college to assess student skills or potential for academic success. The open-access policy maintained at this college assumes that there are academic programs, certificates, or degrees that are beneficial to anyone pursuing academic and career success. The mission of the college is to help place the student in classes consistant with the student's skills and interests. I could see from the beginning interviews of the study that the open-access policy of the college creates a population of students with a bewildering array of academic backgrounds. I thought that exploring these complex backgrounds themselves would be more pertinent to the study than a grade point average.

I limited the participants to students who stated that they were interested in pursuing a specific certificate or degree program at the college. These students were enrolled mainly in courses required to fulfill liberal arts requirements, or the developmental classes leading to those courses. I also monitored the participants' enrollment status at the college.

Data Analysis

Coding

In the summer and fall of 1998, when approximately 60 percent of the interviews were completed and transcribed, I began assigning descriptive codes to get an overview of the extensive amount of data. Miles and Huberman (1984) recommend beginning the coding of data early so that the codes can be used to pinpoint issues that might be helpful to later interviews.

The Grounded Theory Approach consists of coding the data after collection as opposed to developing codes and then fitting the data into the codes. By allowing the codes to emerge from the data, the researcher is more sensitive to the immediate context in which the data was found. The researcher can pay more attention to the variety of the data and build codes around whatever unexpected as well as expected data appears. Using this grounded approach was especially important in this study because there is so little research available concerning rural colleges and traditional- age students in community colleges. If I had used preliminary codes based on the studies involving four year institutions or large urban or suburban colleges and students, I would have to begin with assumptions that there are similarities between these institutions and a small, rural community college. Although that possibility might have existed, I wanted to allow any and all issues specific to this particular college to emerge as a consequence of the interview questions.

During the descriptive coding, I noticed that almost all of the students discussed difficulties they encountered in school when they had moved with their parents to new locations. In the following interviews I began asking more questions regarding the students relocations over their school years, and this gave me greater insight into what I believe might be a local factor affecting the college choice of these students. Coding

some interviews before the last interviews were completed made me more aware of issues that needed to be explored.

At first, the codes were most noticeably related to each other by the chronological sequence of the interview questions. The first two interviews were general in nature and focused on each student's general characteristics; age, educational attainment, place of birth, location of high schools attended, and length of time in the college's geographic area. In these two interviews, I also repeatedly asked about the information that the student had concerning college life in general, and specific colleges that had been considered before deciding to attend this community college. This chronological order gave the coding a basic structural order that is important to working with a large amount of data (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Because of this sequence, the first codes repeatedly had a somewhat negative aspect as students discussed relocations, family problems, loss of academic credits, and lack of information. However, later interviews that covered post-high school experiences were more positive and led into a greater variety of academic, social, and work experiences. This obvious difference led to some conceptual types of codes that were embedded in the chronology.

The descriptive codes were semantic, using words or phrases to capture chunks of information in the data. I often used a student's phrase for a code because it seemed to capture a situation common to other students. For example, many students really couldn't think of a time when they decided to attend college because they had "always" assumed they would. In one student's words, "I had thought about going to college forever." The expression, "college forever" was used as a code to classify those times when students had assumed at a very young age that they would go to college and were unable to pinpoint an exact time that they made this decision.

I used multiple coding for large chunks of data that showed multiple influences in a student's decision making process (Becker, Gordon, and LeBailly, 1984). And I also used marginal remarks to note connections with previous data and to highlight important ideas that were emerging from the data. I used the constant comparative method to go back over all interviews when new codes were developed until no new categories were emerging from the data.

All of these techniques, descriptive coding, multiple coding, constant comparative methods, and marginal remarks led to the possible theory that family background was a consistant factor in the participant' ability to benefit from prior schooling and to develop the skills and abilities necessary to attend college. By using Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure, I was able to clarify the idea that the pre-entry attributes were major factors in the decision-making process of these twelve participants.

CHAPTER 4 INTERVIEW DATA

Overview

To begin this portrait, I introduce each participant alphabetically by pseudonym so that the name and general background of the individual is clear and is distinguishable from the other participants (Table 1). The interview data is then presented from each student beginning with the student's views of his or her educational background, and comments on some of the events that led up to the decision to enroll in classes at the community college. I have summarized the basic personal information about each student to facilitate an understanding of the student's background. Later interview data includes the students' comments on their first year experience as they completed at least two semesters of college. Where needed, I have added clarifications to the students' comments in parenthesis.

I found that the original order in which I recruited students grouped the participants into somewhat similar categories. I recruited the first two students, Abby and Brenda, from the lowest skills level class, developmental reading, that I teach at the college, and they were both taking other developmental or adult basic education classes during their first semester. The next group of students would include Cathy, Dorothy, Elaine, and Freida, participants who were recruited from different sections of Psychology 101. Except for Elaine, these students had all placed into college level classes immediately upon enrolling at the college, and Elaine only had to take a brief grammar brush-up class even though she was a high school student just beginning her senior year. I recruited the remaining six students, starting with Greg, from among the academic advisees I have worked with over the past two years. These advisees show a greater variety in their preparation for college but most had taken only one developmental class in math or writing and had progressed on to their college level classes.

Table 1

Participant Information

Student	M/F	*No. of Credits	Age	Prior Schooling	Family of Origin	Origin	Current Status
Abby	F	9	18	Diploma	Mother	Illinois	Withdrew
Brenda	F	9	24	GED	Mother/Stepfather	California	Certificate
Cathy	F	12	20	Diploma+	Mother	Illinois	AAS
Dorothy	F	15	20	Diploma+	Mother/Stepfather	Local/Phoenix	AA
Elaine	F	9	18	Diploma	Mother	Minnesota	Transfer
Freda	F	6	20	Diploma	Mother/Father	Local	Continuing
Greg	M	15	23	GED	Mother	California	Withdrew
Helen	F	30	20	Diploma	Mother	California	Withdrew
Ike	M	3	20	GED	Mother	California	Continuing
Janice	F	18	19	Diploma	Mother/Father	Local	Withdrew
Kevin	M	3	20	GED	Mother	Local	Withdrew
Leanne	F	9	19	GED	Mother	Indiana	Continuing

*Number of credits at first interview

The Twelve Partiticipants

Abby

Abby is a nineteen year old student raised in the Chicago area who moved to Arizona after her high school graduation. She started public schooling at five and was held back a year in first grade. By the end of second grade she was diagnosed as having a learning disability. The school district than moved her to a school that offered special education classes. She continued to take most of her classes in special education through junior high and high school. She is very disparaging of the high school she attended:

> Because they just didn't care. They don't care there. They act as if - 'cause our name, our name is the Titans. We're called the Titan family, but that's a bunch of bull garbage. A lot of schools, the money that they take in, they use for the schools - they pocket it, and we all know it. They had people in there - one teacher who has, we know for a fact, has done a lot drugs and everything else. And a P.E. teacher who discriminates against people, and from what I hear he is going to be out now. I heard from people after I had left that they got a hold of him, and he's finally going to be kicked out. We had one we know slept her way to the top. Well, I don't know, but the way she is! And somebody told me that they caught her. So there's just a whole bunch of problems.

Abby was somewhat more positive about the teachers she had in the special education program, but thought the problems she was having in her first semester at the college were due at least partially to being passed along every year without mastering math and English basics.

> I had some teachers who were okay. All my teachers I had for that were okay. They were all - I only had one that I personally - she was okay, but she didn't really work with you. She sometimes did it. She did that with one of the other students that I used to help, that I helped teach.

Abby tutored younger children from the time she was in elementary school and won two awards for her work with students. She was determined to be a teacher and sought out advice on college opportunities:

> Yes, I talked to the - one of my special ed. teachers, and I talked to my counselor. I had to talk to my psychiatrist at the high school; my mom is like best friends with him. And he had told me when I had my annual review, 'cause in special ed. you have to have annual reviews, that when you went to college, that if I didn't come out here, that I was supposed to go to South Suburban College.

I asked Abby if she had visited the South Suburban campus while she was in high school, and her response shows some of the evaluation process she was going through during high school:

> No, I've seen South Suburban campus from the outside, but even - everytime I went by it, I was always skeptical of it because I used to drive in that neighborhood all the time, and I was always, 'Oh, there's South Suburban.' And even saying that name and always driving by it, I was always kind of uptight. That area always, for some reason, always made me uptight... I don't know if it's a really big school, but it seems - it's back in the road. It's like in the back and with everything around it. And that neighborhood's just one to make you kind of tense because of the type of kids in that area and that, like your drug dealers and like that, kind of your rich, stuck-up, snobby type. I just kinda like don't care for that. It just scares me. It's just like every time talking about it and everything and even going by it, before even the point came that I had to choose a college and everything, it was like, it was always in my mind - how can I go to South Suburban? Oh, you know, a dark kinda place and lonely.

Abby experienced considerable anxiety at the end of high school and was glad she eventually decided to move to Arizona:

No, I don't regret making this decision. The was the best one I made and that. And as I'm here, it kinda - if I decide, and I don't know if I'm deciding to move back there or not - but if I do, it prepares me now. As to when I moved here, I was so scared when I was just coming out of high school, talking about 'Oh, what college are you going to?' and everything else. And everyone is 'Oh, I'm going here, and I'm going here.' And I'm like, 'I'm probably going to go to South Suburban and everything else.' What they had to offer me was good, you know? And every time I kept saying it, and we're talking about it, inside I was just so scared and that. I just was like, 'Oh, I don't think I'm going to be able to go.' I was just so frightened and that.

Conversely, Abby's view of High Desert Community College, which was recommended by her aunt, was very different:

I guess even over the phone, me and my aunt, we always talked about it. She was telling me about what she knew and everthing else - I wasn't afraid. For some reason, I was not afraid to come here. And then even when I set foot on the premises, and that was registering, I was in school, and I wasn't afraid. But I was kind of a little bit nervous the first day if I was going to be in the right place, kinda. But it wasn't that bad. It wasn't like, 'Oh my gosh.' You know, to like where I'm usually very silent, very distant from everybody, and if I talk, I talk very softly so no one can hear me because I'm - I don't like to really talk. I used to be shy, and I'm still shy sometimes. Like a whole group of people, if I know one person, I'll cling to them until I get to know the others. And then, even then, I'll still cling to that one person that I know, or the few that I do know. But I wasn't like that. For the first time I actually branched and started talking to the one who sat behind me. I always talk to her.

Abby came to the campus during the summer to enroll for fall and to ask for services for her learning disability. After taking an assessment test, she was placed in an adult basic education class to review arithmetic skills, a college developmental reading class, and the college level sign language class. Her advisor recommended sign language because Abby was interested in working in special education and because it fulfilled the language requirement if Abby went on to complete a bachelor's degree. Overall, Abby was very positive about her first year at the college, particularly the assistance that she received in the adult basic education math class:

> Good, that's been going really good. I have something now that I've been having a stumbling block on, and I've been working a lot of hours. I've been trying to get it, and I've been having problems with the division part. But otherwise, it's pretty good. I'm learning it now. They're really helpful. They take the time to explain the different ways of what works best with me instead of saying, "Oh well, we'll just pass you." Which they would do in high school. You know I whizzed right through division in high school because they wouldn't take the time to really sit down and help me understand... Basically I try to stick with these two tutors because they know exactly what I'm doing, especially Linda because she knows exactly where I'm at, and she's been really good to me. And she's been giving me my work, so she really knows me. She knows where I'm at, how much I'm doing. The others know how much I'm doing because if she's not there they help me out a little bit, and that's - I love it. It gets me out of the house.

During this first semester, Abby also completed the college reading class successfully. During her second semester, Abby continued to work in the Success Center and take a developmental writing class. She began to have problems with it and sought

out the instructor, who worked fulltime at a nearby elementary school:

> Yeah, I went out there. In fact, we had a paper, a paragraph, that we were supposed to write, and I was not there on Wednesday. I missed like two days in that class and two days in math because I was sick - ugh - just like sick. And I - when I got back to class, I turned in the homework that I had to have done because I was behind, and I made sure that I handed it in. But when I got that back, she had written on it, "think" and a question mark, and then she said, "long sentence." But as much as I tried reading my paper to see what she meant, I couldn't get it. So, I tried to call her to see if I could see her before class, so I can ask her, "what do you mean?" And I went out to the school, and she explained it to me, and I said, "oh, okay, now I see what you're saying." And I went home and I rewrote it like that because she had took the time to explain what she meant by what she wrote. And that's like some of my tests. When I take tests, I had asked her, "I don't understand." And she explained it to where I understood it. So she's really - I like her a lot. She's not going to be teaching the class next time. She's trying to transfer to Las Vegas or something.

Abby also made a few friends in her classes which is important because she had moved to the area from Chicago and knew only family members:

> In my class here, I met two people, but one of them dropped, and now there's only one, and I sit with her all the time, and we talk. And as soon as I'm done here, I'm going to the Student Center, and we're going to study and everything. And then Wednesday, she's going to come over to my house, and we're going to go look for her, because she wants to move out of her apartment. And we're going to go look at houses for her to move out here. And then Saturday, we're probably going to go to the movies.

Abby worked closely with the Director of Disability Services while at the college, and she attended at least one college event, " I went to one of the storytellings that they had at the museum downtown. I went and heard, and I love storytelling."

After her first year at the college, Abby returned to Chicago for the summer after pre-registering for the fall semester. However, she did not pay her tuition, and did not realize that her registration would be cancelled if the tuition was not paid by the spring deadline. Consequently, when she returned to the college in the fall, she was angry to find out that she had to re-register. During this second fall semester, Abby found a job through the Vocational Rehabilitation Department as a maintainance worker at a department store and withdrew from college. In a follow-up interview, she said that she needed to take the time off from work and school to have knee surgery and that she hopes to return in a few years. At the time that she withdrew, she was still having difficulty with long division and was having difficulty in the sign language class again.

Brenda

Brenda, at 24, was the oldest student in the study. She dropped out of high school just before turning 16:

> 'Cause I just got into a bunch of trouble, just partied and all that stuff, so I just dropped out. I sure wish I didn't, but I did.

Brenda was born in California, raised in Oregon, and moved to the local area just before starting junior high school. When I asked what her mother said when Brenda dropped out of high school, Brenda explained:

> Not too much, maybe my mom but not my stepdad. But I have six brothers and sisters, and none of them has graduated yet in our family. But my little sister is getting ready to graduate. She will be the first one actually to graduate from high school.

After leaving high school, Brenda continued to live with her parents for a brief period, but this was obviously not a productive time for her:

> Oh, I worked odd jobs here and there. Then I moved to Seattle with my sister for about a year, and I worked in a daycare there. And then I came back here and just ran around back here and got into trouble doing whatever.

Like several other students in the study who had dropped out of high school, Brenda expressed some boredom with her situation:

> Well, I lived with my mom, then I lived with my boyfriend who supported me all those years. Then I just got tired of it. Then I started working taking care of this elderly lady for awhile, and I thought I might as well get my nursing - go for my nursing. Go to school and get my GED, and stay out of trouble.

After being out of school approximately six years, Brenda was incarcerated in another state for six months on drug charges. During her prison term, she worked as an aide to an elderly woman and gained experience in providing care for the first time, "Yeah, I liked that, a lot of it, bed changes, diaper changes." Her mother, a sister, and a cousin who Brenda was close to, all worked as certified nurse assistants in the local area. When Brenda was released from prison, her mother obtained a job for her in home nursing which she held for over a year:

> Well, when I got out, they paid five dollars an hour, so I was working twelve hours. I'd go over there at night and sleep over there. I got paid by the hour even when I was sleeping. She passed away, and so I wanted to get my license like when I was taking care of her. And I wanted to get my CNA, and then I wanted to go for nursing.

Her family members encouraged Brenda to complete her GED, which she eventually did, and approximately a year later, she enrolled in the community college:

> It was pretty nice. It was different going back to school. I went back into the classes, so it kind of got me back into school. At first I took my GED, and then I started taking the classes (she is referring to the developmental classes), and I started thinking, well, I could go back to school. I went through all the procedures and stuff, the schedules, the financial stuff, and all that.

Brenda began her college year by taking the developmental reading that I teach and then went on to the classes required for the Certified Nurse Assistant program. Going to college was a very new experience for her:

> I didn't have no clue what it was going to be like. I didn't know. I had never been into a college class. I'd never been inside the classroom, so it was a lot of anxiety. So I showed up about fifteen minutes early for the first few classes, so I wouldn't miss anything. I thought, whatever! And then after you get through it, you know, for a couple of weeks, you kind of get into it... It was different from high school, because high school was much more - because I was pretty much the class clown - doing this destructive - whatever. So it was much more mellow: it was different. I haven't been surprised by too much because I didn't know what to expect in the first place."

She found some of the developmental English to be boring and did not like the way classes were spread out over the day which interfered with her hope of getting a part-time job. She found the developmental math class to be the only difficult part of her program:

> It's stuff I never even learned in school. It's like, Whoa! And it's like basic math, and I'm like, Wow!

During her time at the college, she spoke to an advisor once, but did not use any other services as the college, not even the math tutoring. She did consider other majors:

> I know somebody who's going into liberal arts; somebody else wants to be a psychologist, so they seem interesting. I'm waiting for the one thing to click.

She had also thought about going to a four-year college:

> That's kind of scary, you know? Going to a big college. You see it all the time on TV and stuff like that, you know? But I've thought about it.

As the year progressed, Brenda was exposed to a broader concept of the opportunities available to her:

> I think it's more expanded then it was in the beginning. In the beginning, it was just like - my short term goal now was pretty much my long term goal then. Now my long term goal is expanded a great deal. So I mean my short term goals are just getting through this semester, but my long term goal is to be a nurse. So it's expanded.

Brenda did pass everything required to enter the Certified Nurse Assistant program and graduated with the certificate after her second semester. She was unable to complete the last two interviews, and has not returned to the college yet to begin work in the nursing program.

Cathy

Cathy moved to the local area to live with an aunt during the summer before her senior year in high school. Her parents were divorced, and Cathy's mother was having a difficult time financially supporting two daughters. Cathy repeatedly commented that her aunt had helped her become more responsible and independent:

> Oh, when I first moved out here I was pretty much just a little teenager with no responsibilities, and now I'm financially responsible, and I just know how to take care myself. So I've grown up a lot.

Changing schools in senior year was difficult for Cathy, and she made few friends during her year in the high school:

> People are not nice here. I didn't think that the high school - I mean - I guess in Chicago we were used to so many people coming in late, that you accept them a lot

> easier than you do here. I was probably here a week or two before anybody asked me my name...I didn't know very many students in high school. Now I know everybody, but I didn't meet the people I went to high school with until after I graduated. But I don't know, this was like a totally different atmosphere to Chicago, so I was just kind of scared I guess.

Cathy enrolled in the community college during her senior year in high school on the recommendation of her high school conselor. She had also attended Senior Day on campus and spoken to a campus advisor:

> We took a tour of all the buildings and some of the teachers talked about certain classes. And I just thought it was a nice little atmosphere. I can enjoy it and still accomplish what I need to without too much trouble.

During her senior year, Cathy took a chemistry class at the high school that convinced her that she wanted a career in the sciences. She completed several of her college libera! arts requirements through dual enrollment during her last semester at the high school, and she then moved rapidly through the core courses for an associates degree program in the sciences. During her semesters at the community college, she also worked twenty to thirty hours a week at WalMart:

> ...I have to keep busy with just doing this, so I work a lot. I can't feel I'm not part of the world. I have to do something for the world even if it's just working at WalMart in order to go to college. I have to do my part.

In a similar vein, Cathy was hoping to eventually work in the field of chemical research. At least twice during the interviews she mentioned jokingly that she wanted to find the cure for cancer, but obviously she evaluated working in the sciences as being an important contribution to society. Cathy also ran for an office in Student Government at the college and won a position which she held for a year. The thing she found most

difficult about the college was the scheduling of classes on alternate days but was not worried about doing well in classes:

> I don't know if the work is hard or not, I just - I think I'm a pretty good learner, so I don't think I have any problems.

She did think it was very different from her high school experience:

> Yes, there's not so much busy work. They don't try to like keep you occupied like they do in high school. They expect you to learn, and for you to take the responsiblity to learn. And it's all up to you basically. High school - it's more up to the teachers to learn. In college, it's up to you. Not so much busy work, and - research papers! I never had a research paper that was anything like these ones that are fifteen/twenty pages long. It's just hard. The first one I had was a killer.

Cathy declared a major in chemistry soon after coming to the college, and although she said that as a general rule she did not know any of her instructors, she talked to the chemistry instructor about the opportunities in that field. She also discussed this with an academic advisor and sent away for brochures about university programs in the sciences. She also attended the Career Day held by the campus. Because she worked full-time, she thought that she did not have the opportunity to make friends on the campus. Her full schedule also probably led her to occassionally consider withdrawing from school:

> I mean a couple of times, I got really stressed out at work and then at school, and then my car wasn't running. And it like all hit me at once. And I think I'm through - there's no way I'm going to be able to do good at the end of the semester. But it all worked out.

Like most of the other students in this study, Cathy expressed some reservations about starting college at a four-year institution:

> I heard about going to college from a counselor because they started talking to me about colleges in my senior year. Faster when I started here (in the local area)

> because you can also take credits in high school. I thought about it a little bit, but not really because I didn't think I was ready, and that kind of atmosphere is quite a bit different. You can't even get a parking space.

Cathy was surprised to find that the classes she was taking at the community college were the same as the classes her friends were taking elsewhere:

> Which is strange because I didn't think that, but their first semester, they were taking the same courses, the same things, at just a bigger university. So we had some things in common which I didn't expect at all.

Cathy was clear that attending the community college was the only way financially that she could afford college, and that several of her friends encountered money problems by going away to college:

> Well, they either come back or they're doing great. I had a couple who had to come back because they have to pay their bills before they can go back again. And then I had others who - someone else is paying for them, and they're doing just fine. They didn't have to worry about the financial responsibilities. But the ones who had the financial responsibilities, quite a few of them came back to pay their bills and then go back.

At the time of her last interview, Cathy had not decided which university to transfer to, but she had gathered extensive information about all the public universities in Arizona and several of the private ones. Because she had started taking classes while in high school, Cathy graduated in less that two years with a Associate of Applied Science.

Dorothy

Dorothy was born in the local area, but when she was in second grade her parents divorced, and she moved to Phoenix with her mother. Dorothy graduated from a high school in the Phoenix area and then moved back to the local area to live with family members who work at the college. Dorothy remembered the campus very clearly because

a relative had worked on the facilities crew, and she also had the most background knowledge about colleges of any of the students in the study:

> He used to be a janitor, I think, when he first started here, and I used to go around with him in the college and empty wastepaper baskets and stuff like that, and fold the American flag. So I've been on the campus when it wasn't this big, but I haven't been around in a long time. And when it got to be my senior year in high school, then I was in college-bound English; it was a special class for seniors, and it was for the senior English credit, but we learned a lot about colleges.

Dorothy was dual enrolled in high school and a community college in Phoenix during her senior year, and she also had made trips to two other university campuses before deciding to attend this college. But she did not originally want to return to the local area:

> I wanted to be a teacher. And so, yeah, I think my freshman and sophomore year, my dad was bothering me about - he wanted me to be a nurse, "Oh, come here to go to college." I'm like, that place? And I hadn't lived here in a long time, and I was biased 'cause my Mom didn't like this town, and so I had all her opinions on me. So I said, 'That place, no way! And then about my junior year, I decided I wanted to be a teacher, which has changed now already, but - and I was really interested in that stuff, so that's when I started thinking about college and where to go. But I did not want to come here because I was just biased against living here because I was just under the impression that it was a dustbowl of a town - just small - no fun. That was my impression.

It was obvious that her extended family had spent a considerable amount of time talking to her about college majors and programs:

> My dad sent me information because at the very beginning of my senior year when I was taking my SATs and applying for different colleges and stuff, I was sort of

considering coming to this college as kind of like a last resort at that point. I still wasn't comfortable with the idea of coming here. I don't know if I sent an application here, but I know I sent my SATs scores here, and I know I asked my dad to send me information from here, and I know he sent me a catalogue and a schedule and stuff like that... My stepdad had mentioned to me that there is a tremendous need for translators in the court system. He's a judge in Phoenix. He said that some of the translators make more than the judges do. They make more money doing that. And besides money, I think it would just be fun and interesting, and I would like to learn about the culture too of the Latin countries.

Dorothy had decided on a major that involved writing because she had experience working on her high school newspaper and yearbook. She spoke to the college advisor about various possibilities:

...The day I was declaring a major - that was two - two Tuesdays ago - just two weeks ago. And I talked to her for about an hour, and we decided that liberal arts would be the way to go because of - because I wanted to write and do Spanish. And it was that or an English major. I didn't really want to be an English major because I wasn't too interested in the syntax and the grammar of the sentence, and that just comes with English. So I thought liberal arts, and then I started thinking everyone makes fun of liberal arts majors because it's supposedly an easy degree. And like there's this teacher I saw that said, "I have a Liberal Arts Degree, do you want fries with that?" It was like - Oh no, what am I getting myself into? But I don't want to sound like I'm bragging or something, but I have writing talent, and I don't think it matters what degree I pick. I think I can succeed with any degree I pick because I have talent in that area.

Dorothy worked in the college administration offices for twenty hours a week, and was an officer in Student Government during her two years at the college. During her

first semester, Dorothy found that the community college classes did not challenge her as much as she thought they would:

> I think they are way too easy actually. The Spanish class - I could've made it to every single class, but there were two times that I didn't go because I knew - and it's a two hour long class and it was jut like - the information that she was presenting was not new to me, and it was repetitious. And sometimes I think, Jeez, I hope it gets harder. But now I'm kind of glad because I'm getting all A's. Biology has been a challenge. That one's the only one that's really been a challenge to me though.

Dorothy might have had unrealistic expectations about college life which was not uncommon among the other students as well:

> I like going to school here, and I'm proud to go here. Before I was skeptical about the town, like I said. But I love the town now. I think that it's - I could be happy any place. And the classes and everything, I don't know, I was expecting to go a university really for the first year. Even though I didn't want to, I was expecting to. And so it really isn't like I expected. I guess because I expected to be in huge lecture rooms with teachers who didn't speak very good English and were hard to understand. And - I don't know - with sign-in sheets, and they didn't really care if you showed up or not. People here care if you show up or not. They notice at least even if they don't care, they notice. So it's not really what I expected.

In later interviews, Dorothy found that her classes were becoming more difficult:

> They were a lot more tough than I expected. My first semester was like a piece of cake. And I don't know if there were more things going on in my personal life as well, like I started going to the gym, and just other things. I was just gone every weekend to Las Vegas or Phoenix, so - . Also, the classes were pretty tough...I dropped Spanish, and I took English 102, that was actually pretty easy. It wasn't

> that bad. And then humanities was pretty easy. It's just more like - it just seemed tougher for some reason than last semester. It wasn't really difficult. And I took philosopy, and that was really interesting. I think the main thing was just that I had term papers to write, so many pages of writing! And it was like I had to have them in by the due dates, and that was like really stressful for that. I think that's the main thing why it seemed so tough because last semester I only had like one term papter to write, and that was for psychology. And then this semester I had three, so - I'm sure that's what it was.

Dorothy dropped the second level Spanish class because she ran into an unfortunate experience with a part-time instructor who was scheduled to teach a class and then had her husband teach it without informing the college:

> She was the instructor for Spanish 101. And then, Spanish 102, she had her husband teaching it. And she wasn't there. And she speaks English and Spanish, and he only speaks Spanish, so he speaks very, very little English. And I couldn't understand what he was saying. For like - I'm pretty good with vocabulary, but the concepts, the grammar concepts in Spanish, I couldn't understand because he was talking in Spanish. I just didn't understand the concepts. I didn't know what kind of grade I was getting because there was no way for me to communicate with him. So that's why I dropped that class - was because I was afraid that my GPA would be lowered, and I wouldn't learn the right grammar concepts because he was only speaking Spanish.

Although there were fourteen students in this class, no one complained or even commented to the administration about the situation. When I asked Dorothy why she had not mentioned this to another instructor or to the dean, she replied:

> Well - I - She just had him teach. I don't know if he was listed (in the schedule) or not. I didn't ask anybody. I just - cause I really didn't want to deal with it. I

> could take it during summer school, it's not that big of a deal. What I'm planning on doing is taking it over the summer at ASU to get a taste of what ASU is like. So, it wasn't that much of a big deal. I just didn't want to lower my GPA about it, you know? She called me. She did the follow-up, which is kind of weird, because she had him teaching, but she did the follow-up when I dropped it. She asked me why I dropped it, and I told her it was because I didn't understand her husband. And while it was really good for the grammar and the pronunciation - for the vocabulary and pronunciation - I was horrible at the grammar part. And I didn't know - okay, on the syllabus, it said when assignments were to be turned in, but it was just really confusing for me to keep up with which assignments because I didn't understand what he was saying.

Possibly because of this experience, Dorothy's evaluation of the teachers at the college was the only mediocre evaluation given by a student:

> Well, I would say that I like the subject matter that I'm learning, and I got along with most of my instructors. They weren't bad teachers, I don't think. Maybe one or two of them weren't the best in the world. It wasn't a horrible situation by any means. And you get bad teachers and good teachers wherever you go. So, overall, I mean they weren't bad at all.

Dorothy did not take Spanish 102 in Phoenix during the summer, but came back to this campus to complete it in the fall with a new instructor. She has completed the requirements for a liberal arts degree which she intends to transfer to a university in the fall of 1999. She is continuing to take courses at the community college until then to accumulate as many credits as possible on her tuition waiver.

Elaine

Elaine started taking college classes while she was a seventeen year old high school senior. She moved to the local area during her junior year in high school when her

mother was transferred from Minnesota to Arizona to run the personnel department of a new steel plant. She learned about the community college from a college advisor who visited the high school to administer the placement test, but she did not realize that she had placed into a grammar class that had to be completed before she could take any college level courses:

> We had the ASSET Test come in, and I took that test at school one day. I was going to do the Head Start (Early Start) summer program, but I thought - I didn't realize that you needed to register - so I came in the day before classes started because my Mom was out of town, or something happened. So she (the advisor) told me I couldn't take - I was just going to take a psychology class during the summer and then start...And I couldn't take it, so I didn't take any of my Head Start classes. And then I decided that I was going to. I wanted to take more classes. So I just got the developmental English over with.

Because she was under 18 years old, Elaine was not allowed to enroll that summer without her mother's signature. Consequently, she began taking classes in the fall semester while completing her senior year of high school, working at a local motel for sixteen hours each weekend, and directing or acting in every theater production put on by the high school that year. She thought that taking classes at the college was better than "sitting around watching TV." The interviews with Elaine were conducted during the spring semester of her senior year in high school. She was already planning on moving back to Minnesota to live with her grandparents and establish residency so she could enroll in a state university. She plans to complete a graduate degree in psychology or English as soon as she finishes undergraduate school.

Elaine also thought that the community college classes were much easier than her high school classes:

> The English class I'm taking now is. The 089 class just helped me with my sentence structure, but I knew pretty much everything that was taught. It did help me bone up on it, and I have improved my ACT score. But I catch more of my grammatical errors now, but it's - I've known a lot of this because I took an honors English class which is almost homologous to this English 101 that I'm taking now - seems like. And all we did is write essays.

Elaine did appreciate the college instructors in her classes:

> Instructors are really willing to give up their personal time, I've noticed. But it's not really different than my (high school) instructors, except maybe they're more knowledgeable than high school instructors. It's almost easier to get a hold of instructors up here.... My English 101 teacher - I had to miss a lot of that class for the play we were doing - she was really willing to help me.

During her semesters at the college, Elaine did not work with an advisor or choose a major because she knew that she was transferring to a university in Minnesota when she graduated from high school. She mentioned at one point that she was taking the classes that led to an ASA degree, so it was apparent that she did not know the correct names of the degrees, and she consistantly called her high school scholarship by the wrong name. Elaine stated that she enjoyed being on campus, and that she was just choosing classes that she liked that fit into her high school and theater performance schedule:

> It's more of an interest thing picking these classes now, rather than a schooling or a degree oriented goal because I am so loaded down. If I'm not interested in a class, I won't do well in there with my school and with my after school activities.

Elaine also worked approximately sixteen hours a week at a local motel during the weekend:

> Because I don't like having free time. I get real bored. I feel like I'm wasting time, so I might as well be here instead of just sitting in front of the TV watching TV.

Because she was a high school student, Elaine was not able to participate in many activities on the campus:

> I was going to go see Grease on the other campus, but it was too far, and I didn't want to drive home afterwards. I wish they had classes up here (in theater). I wish they had a stage up here. I'm really into it. I would take classes and classes, because I think I'm going to minor in theater. That's a good idea.

She did, however, use the library and computer lab extensively for her high school assignments as well as college assignments. And she obviously felt very comfortable on campus, "The campus is nice; the instructors are nice. It's a nice little campus." This is in contrast to what she had heard about other campuses:

> I know a guy who's in the honors dorm at ASU. I talked to his dad, and he said he's doing okay, studying a lot. But a lot, about ten percent of that dorm is gone - and that was just this year. I think he'll return next year because he studies and stuff.

During her last interview, Elaine was still planning on completing a graduate degree in English or psychology, possibly a doctoral degree, but she wanted to live with her grandparents while she is in college. When I asked if she ever wanted to live in a dorm, she replied:

> Sometimes, but then I see the realistic side of it. Man, not really. I can never imagine being alone. I would never want to be. I always have to have people around me.

Elaine will receive the high school Early Start Scholarship again during the summer 1999 session, and will have completed approximately fifteen credits before transferring to a university in Minnesota.

Freida

Freida is a twenty year old student from a very remote rural area that is part of the local school district. For her entire elementary and secondary education, she boarded a school bus every morning for a ninety minute ride into school. She enrolled in the community college immediately after graduation from high school but completed only one semester. At that time, she moved to the Phoenix area for several months to live with her grandmother immediately after her grandfather's death. When her family was assured that the grandmother was doing well, Freida returned to the local area and re-enrolled at the college. Although she lives with her parents and they have encouraged her to go to college, there are apparently some problems:

> I talked to my parents some, but more other people that I was close to. My parents weren't very - I mean they wanted me to go to college, but it wasn't a big deal because I would have to pay for it completely myself. I would have no help from them. And so I went to - I talked to my best friend's parents, or my grandparents, and my teachers.

Freida had visited the community college campus several times during high school to get information on programs, and she spent a day on campus for Secretary's Day working in the Dean's Office. She had also considered community colleges in the Phoenix area, Brigham Young University, Grand Canyon University and the Univeristy of Arizona:

> I wanted to go to BYU for when I was looking into being a history major and GCU, Grand Canyon University. But the BYU thing fell through because I was avoiding a marriage, so I stayed out of Utah. And I didn't go to GCU because I couldn't afford it, and I didn't look into scholarships as much as I should have, especially at first. I visited BYU. My grandparents helped fund a part of BYU, so

I have that advantage if I ever want to go there... I visited U of A. I got accepted into their nursing program, but that fell through too. I couldn't afford it. So I decided just to stay here. Financial Aid expects your parents to help some. I don't get any help. I pay rent. I live with my parents, but I pay rent. And I have a car that I'm trying to keep up, and I have this. So I have to work full time and go to school full time so I can keep the insurance. So it's just one of those things where you have to juggle money.

By the time Freida had graduated from high school, she had already decided to go into nursing rather than teach history. She talked to neighbors and friends about enrolling at this college because the nursing program has an exceptionally good reputation, "From what I've heard this is the best in the state, so - except U of A. But as far as community colleges go, I've heard that this is the best." Although she had extensive information about colleges, she also had a few misconceptions:

My ideas of college - When I heard about college, the first story I remember about college is my Dad, he went to BYU. The first day, he sat on the sidewalk and watched the girls. And I remember my Dad - we actually never heard about classes, the academic classes, we heard about the fencing classes and things like that. So my image of college was that...So that was my image of college though. And grown-up people, college kids, I remember always hearing about parties, and I have not seen very many parties since I got into college. I think, Oh yeah, right! I don't have time for that.

Growing up, Freida had always considered going to college because she thought education was very important. At sixteen, this commitment was confirmed by her religious community as well:

It has to do with my religion; I'm LDS. At sixteen, we get a patriarchal blessing. In the blessing, I was told about my education, and that I need to do it. And I

have. And on other occassions, things like that have come up, and education was very much stressed. And not only that, but I like to learn. But that's what clinched it though.

Freida was very positive about her experience at the community college which is important because she had visited a number of four-year and two-year colleges in Arizona and chose this college because it was inexpensive and the nursing program had an outstanding reputation:

> I like them (her classes). The ones that I've taken so far have been well taught. I feel that I've actually learned something, and that I've accomplished something...I thought it was going to be harder. It's not near as hard as I thought it was going to be. So far it's been cake.

Freida had the advantage of knowing many of the students on campus because she had gone to the local high school, and she was very comfortable on campus:

> They're more relaxed. They're not quite as strict. It's not as set of a curriculum. I mean it is to a point. But the teacher is willing - they're not trying to rush through all this stuff just to get it done.

She had just finished a chemistry class during her second interview that she thought was not as difficult as her high school chemistry class; it should be noted however, that this class is taught by an instructor who has a reputation as being one of the best teachers on campus:

> I just finished chemistry and I took it my senior year, and I came in in an "A" in the class. And it's not one of my real strong points. I mean I like it, but it's not one of my strengths. And the tests were not that hard, as long as you read the material and listened to the class, everything is going to be fine. In my English class, I just wrote a research paper, and it wasn't that hard. You just had to do it and not

procrastinate. You know, you just have to eat your lunch. It's hard - but you do it.

Freida took the chemistry class with two friends from high school, one of whom failed to pass the class, although Freida said they all enjoyed the instructor. During this time, Freida was working fifteen to twenty hours a week at a business owned by her best friend's family. The business was located only a few blocks from the campus, and her hours were changed according to her class schedule. She generally took about fourteen credits each semester.

At the time of these two interviews, Freida had not spoken to an advisor or to any of the instructors from the nursing program, and had not been involved in any campus activities. She was unable to complete the last two interviews, but is still enrolled at the college completing the requirements for the nursing program.

She continues to work for the parents of her best friend. She considers her friend's parents and grandparents to be her family. This second family helps her financially and continues to encourage her to stay in college.

Greg

Greg, a twenty-three year old student from California, dropped out of school at the age of fourteen and has worked intermittently at various unskilled jobs in California and Arizona. When I asked Greg how he could legally drop out of school at fourteen, he replied, "I just stopped going. I got sent to continuation schools and got kicked out of a few of those, and I really didn't want to deal with it anymore." At the time, he lived with his mother, who after repeated problems with him, sent Greg to live with his sister in a small desert community in Arizona. When this arrangement did not work out, Greg's grandfather took him in and encouraged him to take classes at the community college. Greg had previously visited a community college campus in California and found it too

expensive and overcrowded:

> It was $1,500 just for classes. And I have to take two years of classes before I can - that I need - before I can take anything I wanted. Big waste of time...I couldn't afford it. I couldn't afford it at all. You have to buy parking permits. You have to buy student insurance, all kinds of crap, along with tuition...They were just way too crowded. There were so many people there. So you have classes at one end of campus, and you have fifteen minutes to run all the way across to the other end of campus for another class.

Greg was originally enrolled in a developmental writing class that I was teaching and had just started a part-time job in the college cafeteria when he was involved in a serious car accident. He was hospitalized for three weeks and had to withdraw from classes for the semester. He returned the following fall but limited his schedule:

> I'm part time; full time is just too much for me. 'Cause I think I have classes throughout the week, mostly late afternoons, so I get to sleep in late, get up, relax, work on my homework, and then I just come to school.

On this schedule, Greg also continued the twice-weekly therapy sessions required for the back injuries he suffered in the accident. He was not able to return to the job he had on campus due to the injuries incurred in the accident, but said that he would never consider dropping out of college. He thought that he had become "more social" while on the campus and had made quite a few friends. He enjoyed being on campus very much:

> They're (his classes) a lot more relaxed. Really mellow. I like that. I have Mr. Smith for computers, and he's off the wall. He's weird. I like him...The campus is really small. There's not a whole lot of people. It's really nice. Really relaxed. I like that.

Like other students in the study, Greg had misconceptions about college life that were based on images of much larger colleges:

> I thought there were going to be these big classrooms, and this one guy way down at the bottom, and you'd be up in these seats. You know, in a big old lecture, and you have to sit and write notes the whole time. Yep, that's kind of what I thought. 'Cause that's all I ever saw of it - on TV.

Greg thought his classes were moderately difficult, "If I want to do good, I actually have to apply myself somehow. I guess that's a plus." He had experience working with computers as a hobby before coming to college and wanted to complete an associate degree in computer information systems:

> I still want to work with computers. In what field I'm not sure yet. I thought I might do maybe some computer graphic work, something like that, something along those lines, I think.

Greg declared a CIS major when he enrolled for the first time at the college, but he had not talked to an advisor or to any of the computer instructors since then. He was sure that he wanted to transfer to DeVry College in California:

> Because they are one of the top computer schools, and I can get hired out of there in about a day. Because they have recruiters who come down there from all the major corporations with all the big money.

Greg completed twelve credits and re-enrolled the following fall, but withdrew during that semester. He did not complete the last two interviews. Although I was unable to contact Greg after he left the college, it was apparent that he did not leave college due to academic problems in his computer classes.

Helen

Helen took a developemental English class that I taught during the summer and volunteered to participant in the study during the following spring. She lives with her

mother, her grandparents, and four other children in a small neighborhood close to the college. Her mother does not work, and her grandparents are both retired. Helen was born in California, but when her mother lost her California job during Helen's first year in high school, the family moved to a small town in Arizona, and then two years later, to the local area:

> Well, my grandfather moved in with us all of a sudden, and he decided he would live in our house. Then he started paying our rent. So we're all, "okay." And then he decided that he was going to move. But since my mother lost her job, we decided we should move with them, so we would have somewhere to live. So we ended up in Arizona. And then just - he's got this thing about moving around. My grandfather likes to move. Can't sit still.

The first move to Arizona coincided with the last week of the third quarter of the school district that Helen was placed into:

> The hardest part was coming from California to the first place we lived in Arizona because my schedule changed completely because they didn't have all the classes I was taking. So they screwed up my schedule completely, and most of my grades got erased. So I had no grades when I got there. And I had taken - I had been taking some pretty nifty little classes. I went from what would here be intermediate algebra - here in college - to what would be basic math, by switching schools my freshman year. I dropped that far, just in math. My science class was even worse because they completely switched the classes because the names were the same, but they - the material they covered were completely different. So I screwed up that way too. And they gave me classes that I had no idea what I was supposed to be

doing in them because I was never given books. In one of my classes, I didn't meet my teacher until the last week of school, and that was for only one day, and that was the day of the final which I didn't take because I didn't know it was there.

Helen's family relocated a second time during her senior year in high school. In this move, the family arrived in the high school district that is the feeder high school for this community college. This is her assessment of the local high school:

I was able to take classes that I seemed to like. I took photography while I was there. That was really, really interesting. I enjoyed that a lot. I really learned how to use the machines and stuff - and do it the hard way instead of just taking it down to the WalMart or Kmart and having them do it for you. Pretty neat. And it was really easy to get into the classes, except for trig, because trig doesn't work there.

The high school in this area does not offer trigonometry, and most high school students enroll in the community college's course to fulfill this requirement. Helen could not do that because she does not drive and had no transportation except the high school bus. This is the explanation of why she failed driver's education twice:

Well, the first time I had it - first I had it at 7:15 in the morning when I lived in California my freshman year. Then I couldn't - I would get there that early but I would be asleep. So I would sleep through the class and be nice and refreshed for French right after that. So I missed the class pretty much. And the second time I took it - well, I just pretty much forgot to go. I have this thing about ditching class. I do it quite often. Normally I get pretty good grades, except for that one. Plus it didn't mean too much at that time. Right now the only thing - I just wish I had a car. Even if I can't drive it, I'd just rather have a car, that way my friends could drive it. And that way, I'd still have a mode of transportation.

Helen graduated from the local high school and spent a year at home, not working, before enrolling for classes at the community college. I asked if she had thought about going to college during this time, and she answered somewhat jokingly, but her answer reveals the nature of her decision to enroll:

> No, I thought about sleeping. So I spent about a year just watching MTV and sleeping. And last spring - when the college was on spring break last year, I came down here, and I applied for a grant, and decided I should go.

Helen credited her mother and grandmother for the decision to enroll at the community college:

> And I spent a whole year just at home, so my mom and grandmother were getting mail from the community college, their little spring and fall booklets, and summer ones. And they kept bugging me about it. And eventually they said either I go to college or I get a job. So I decided college.

She chose English as her major because she is very interested in music and in writing:

> What I want to do is direct music videos, so it should be something like video production or cinematography. So that should be my major, but they're not available here, so we went to English because of the playwriting, I guess, and the creative writing and such.

Helen was on campus for more than nine or ten hours almost every day of the week because she had to accept a ride with friends on their schedule and because she also liked to spend time surfing the Internet at the computer lab. She was able to combine her interests in music and computers in her classes. In one assignment she analyzed the lyrics of the lead singer for the rock band Mettalica:

> I writing down what people's opinion are, what they think they mean, and then what I view them as. And then what the writer says they are. There's interviews of them on MTV, and I've recorded them, so I have video references. There's

> some that are on the Internet from MTV and other places, and it's him, you can see him speaking. So I have valid references from there. And chat - he'll do chat on-line stuff where he'll talk a lot, and I have those printed out. Plus I have magazine articles and books and stuff.

In high school, teachers had told Helen several times not to write pieces that included rock and roll references, Gothic elements, or explicit violence. She had been sent to counseling twice, once after writing a Gothic horror story:

> They told you you were not allowed to write about stuff like this due to whatever it was. But they even had me see an analyst type person 'cause it would be morbid. Yeah, but I never went, I just stopped writing. I just starting writing the gooey stuff they wanted. BS 'em. I learned how to BS in high school. That's what I learned. When people ask me what I learned in school, well, after kindergarten all I learned was BSing. Just do anything to get the grade.

On campus, Helen's writing became a source of recognition among the class members of the creative writing classes she took. This is her description of a play she wrote for a final project in the playwriting class:

> It was a woman who's writing up a character. And she goes and she creates a character in her own mind, and then she ends up going into her own mind and battling her character, and then her character escapes. And the girl is trapped in her own mind. And now both of them have escaped from her own mind, so they're all insane, and they're running around, and there's people dying. But that's really cool 'cause I'm really graphic with stuff like that. It makes my teacher really sick because she has to read the stage directions where it describes all this stuff, and she just gets really involved in it while she's speaking.

Helen made friends easily, often spending an hour or two chatting in a group on the patios around the campus, but as always, she jokes about her situation:

Mainly I didn't really know anyone, but I knew Sally. And one day her and I were just sitting in the cafeteria just talking and one of her friends came over, and we started talking to her. And that's how I met my friend, Anne. And Anne's friend Pete came over, and we started talking to Pete and that's the two of them. And thanks to the two of them, I have a whole bunch of other friends. And I just keep meeting people, and I have no idea who they are.

Helen seemed to like her instructors at the college:

I haven't had an instructor yet, except for humanities, that I didn't really like. And that's because she didn't like my choice of music, so I think she graded me quite a bit on that - on my opinions instead of what I actually did.

Helen also liked the less structured attendance requirements at the college:

They're (classes) what I expected except for - well - I don't really have to go to them, I just have to do the work. That I like. In high school, I had to go to the classes, and I had to do the work. But I didn't like always having to go to class because sometimes there was something else I wanted to work on instead. And right now I'm taking a CIS course designing effective web pages. And it's on Mondays from one to four, and during that time, I am so busy doing other things that I forget about that class. But I work on my web pages Monday mornings and Wednesday afternoon anyways, so I get the work done. I just don't go to the class itself. And I have time to get the work from my other classes done then. So it works out.

Helen maintained fairly high grades even though her schedule seemed hectic:

Well, the ones that are at night I'm generally really, really tired for, especially for Math 121. I have that from 7:00 to 8:40, and I'm yawning 'cause I'm here at before 9:00 a.m. everyday. And Tom (the instructor) is really concerned about it because I yawn through it when I go to it, and sometimes I don't. Sometimes I go

> home and sleep, or I'm too busy typing for English the next morning because I don't type very fast.

Helen did not work with an advisor while she was on campus, but she did often meet and talk with instructors. She was, however, annoyed by an instructor for missing classes:

> Sometimes I talk to instructors outside of class. Mainly to tell them that I may or may not be in class, or find out why they weren't in class, and why I had to sign a piece of paper saying I was there because the teacher didn't tell us she was going to be gone. Mrs. Jones has done that to us twice. Once she was sick, and the office didn't call us. The second time, she had a flat tire and called - and finally called right after I turned in the paper, so I could have had more time.

During her first year on campus, Helen tutored in the computer lab on the campus for about ten hours a week, attended several of the art shows, and generally was involved in campus life, including a hotly contested Student Government campaign. In later interviews, she evaulated her academic experiences:

> Because in high school I could have done - I could have been through that in two and a half years, but I lollygagged and played around and went to different schools. So it doesn't surprise me. I'm weird. Some of my friends though have been here for three years, and they have pretty much nothing done, and I don't understand why. And then they yell at me because I don't read my English book and I get a "B" on the test. I'm still tripping over that, and that was a week ago.

Helen also began researching four-year colleges in California and the midwest by phone and over the internet, and even knew which colleges had a film- making department as opposed to a film-making school. However, she never took the college level math or science classes required for the Associates degree during these semesters, a discrepancy characteristic of students who do not transfer to four-year colleges (Lee and Frank, 1990).

During her last semester, Helen requested that an instructor allow her to take two sections of creative writing because the course was not going to be offered for another year. She completed the work for one section without attending the class more than a few times, but she did not complete any work for the second section. For some reason, she did not withdraw from the second section and was unable to repay the cost to her financial aid grant. This made her ineligible to return to campus.

Ike

Ike is a twenty-year-old student who completed his GED testing on campus and enrolled in a college reading class that I taught. He lives with his widowed mother, who works in a casino in Nevada, and his twenty-one year old brother, who was also on campus completing a computer degree program. He was "kicked out" of high school in the tenth grade for attendance problems when his family moved back to the local area after a long history of moving around the sourthern and western United States. He realizes that some of his difficulty with the local high school was caused by the constant moving around:

> It was all right. I don't know, but I was moving all over the place, so I wasn't really comfortable with it, you know? I didn't really know anyone there. I don't know, it was all right. I didn't go that much.

Ike had never been on a college campus before attending GED classes in another Arizona city. He decided to attend college after three years of "not really making any money" because he could only find "dead-end jobs" and because his brother recommended it:

> 'Cause my brother goes all the time, and he said it's a pretty good school. I don't know. Stuff like that. It's better than working at McDonald's, something like that. Gotta do something. Figured I might as well go to school.

Ike's brother helped him study for the GED and continued to advise him on classes at the college. Both brothers became interested in taking the classes that lead to Microsoft certification which Ike claimed, "guaranteed a job" with a big corporation

Ike completed the developmental class necessary in the first semester to enroll in the college classes. He was careful to work with an academic advisor, as well as his brother to meet the requirements for his program. He took classes during the summer sessions to finish his program as quickly as possible, but understood he had to plan the summer courses carefully:

> I think an art class for the first part of the semester, but I think I'm going to have an advisor help me pick out what class, 'cause I don't know if I should take an English or a math, 'cause I hear - my brother said I'd probably be swamped with that.

He was determined to complete a degree in computers and had never thought of withdrawing from classes, even the difficult ones:

> I still want to stick with computers. English is pretty much my weak spot. I'm a pretty bad speller, so - my handwriting is not too good either. So computers comes pretty easy to me. I got an A plus in that class.

During the second semester, Ike found his classes getting more difficult as most of the other students did. He especially complained about the length of research papers, although he is joking in this comment:

> It's pretty good (this semester). It's kind of hard this - this last one - I'm getting it, I guess... I like them. A lot of homework this semester. That's all right. I just got an "A" on my one thousand, five hundred page report in English 101.

During his first year, Ike attended Career Day with his brother and went to the annual art fair, but other than that he did not participate in any campus activities. He often spoke to the computer instructor that he "really liked," but rarely spoke to other instructors

or asked questions in class. He did make a small group of friends among other computer majors and often saw them off campus. By his third semester at the college, Ike was beginning to think about four-year colleges for the first time although he had little information about them. He was considering transferring to the Flagstaff campus of Northern Arizona University, without realizing that they had an extension program on this campus. When I told him he could complete a liberal arts bachelor's degree on this campus, he commented, "I don't think too many students know that."

I had previously asked Ike if he wished that he had gone to a bigger campus and he said no, because he could transfer all of the credits anywhere. But after a year at the college, Ike was more confident about his academic ability and he said:

> Yeah, I guess I'd like to go to a big college. But I don't have any family really in other big towns.

Ike pointed out that he could not attend college without financial aid. "I don't see how I could." He had worked part-time as a grocery bagger for two of the three years between dropping out of high school and returning to school to complete his GED. He appreciated the opportunity that financial aid gave him:

> (It's) really generous actually. I mean, they give me all the money like for my books and stuff, plus like a little extra. That's fine by me.

Ike is still enrolled at the college and will graduate in spring, 2000. His brother graduated and is transferring to Northern Arizona University. The semester after these interviews were completed, Ike's brother became one of the first students at the college to take and pass the Microsoft certification testing in Phoenix.

Janice

Janice lives in a rural area adjacent to the campus where her parents keep a small amount of livestock, mainly for horseback riding purposes. She became interested in taking classes during her freshman year in high school when her mother took several

classes at the college and enjoyed the experience. When she graduated from the high school, she enrolled in the community college immediately during the summer to take advantage of the Early Start scholarship offered by the college. She also began a full time job at a local insurance company, and "played every sport that we (the insurance company) sponsor, softball, volleyball, and running, but not basketball." Janice had placed into the lowest level of developmental classes in both English and math which is somewhat unusual for a high school graduate.

Since she was working full time and also had to take developmental classes before she could take any liberal arts course, Janice took only one class in the summer session and one in the fall semester. During the summer after her high school graduation, she took one class on the Early Start Scholarship without knowing that she could take up to three classes with it. In the fall, she completed a developmental English class, and in the following spring, when she completed her first two interviews for this study, she had just finished the other developmental classes:

> So I got more done in one semester than I did in summer school and the one other semester. And I mean, it was tough. And I know it was hard because I don't feel like I gave 100 percent in every class. But I passed every one. Every one was a pass/fail class. I didn't have to try as hard as I would have in a real class.

Janice thinks the community college offers a convenient opportunity to take classes, like her friends have done, until she decides what she wants to pursue as a career. Janice was one of the few students who had friends on campus from high school:

> Most of my friends actually were two and three years older than me, so when I was a sophomore just going to high school, they were a senior. So they were already making plans to come here, most of them did, or they didn't go to school at all. I don't know, most of them were in the Navy or one of the Armed Services, and the rest of them came here...None of them really had like goals set, like what they

> really wanted to do. So I think that what most people think when they come out of high school is, I'm going to go there, get all my basic stuff out of the way, and then maybe I'll know what I want to do. And then if I can accomplish it at the community college then I will, if not than I'll move on. At least that's what I thought anyways because I didn't really know what I wanted to do.

The guidance counselor at the high school had provided Janice with extensive information on programs and scholarships at the community college, but Janice did not visit the campus until the day she registered for classes during the summer. She did, however, pay for her classes at the community college entirely through scholarships, including two through the college, and one through the Cowpunchers Association of Arizona.

Janice had previously considered a number of occupations such as horse training, veterinary science, physical therapy, business, and modeling. Over the winter break between semesters, she participated in a 5K run and met a massage therapist who encouraged her to look into massage therapy training programs. Janice had already taken a college level medical terminology class in high school through TechPrep, and massage therapy seemed interesting to her:

> I think it's more like helping people get better. I mean in the insurance business, you don't help people get better. They don't like you because they have to give you their money, and they don't want to. In massage therapy you can help somebody, and you can make friends, and you can actually heal people, as in the business I'm in now I can't . And I don't want to be a doctor and see all the blood and guts and that kind of thing. So I found a happy medium.

Janice followed up on this interest by calling massage therapy schools in Arizona and Nevada, and by searching for information on the Internet. She was convinced from the information she found that "massage therapy is a growing field." She originally made

an appointment to visit a massage therapy school in Nevada, but said, "I don't think Vegas is the place for me, plus no family, I just wouldn't like it." She then decided on a school in the Phoenix area. At the time of the interviews, she was filling out an application and pursuing financial aid:

> I think the point that I got to before this is that I'm going nowhere fast, and I just want to do something, just get away for a little bit and become somebody. I've always had this thing in the back of my head that I want people to know me, like being a model. Everybody knows who Cindy Crawford is. Everybody knows who Pamela Anderson is. I've always wanted to be somebody like that. Maybe not a bigshot in the magazines, but a good massage therapist, where eveyone in town says, "You know what? You want a good massage? You go to Janice." Just that kind of person. I've always wanted that.

Janice thought that there were substantial differences between high school and college work:

> I think there are a lot of surprises because in high school everything was taught so differently. Everything here was so relaxed. I think the weirdest thing here was actually going to school with adults. Being with parents is kind of weird. But the way the teaching is - once a week, you know, is really different too. It kind of takes some adjusting, but the classes were actually a lot harder than I thought. You know? I just thought it was going to be like high school - breeze by, but it's not. You actually have to study, pay attention. You don't have to go to classes, but if you want to pass you have to. That's the catch.

Janice was the only student in the study who readily listed several activities that she would be involved in if she wasn't going to college. She wanted to leave the area and look for other jobs. Janice did not enroll in college the following fall semester, and I was unable to find a telephone number to contact her.

Kevin

Kevin is a twenty-year-old student who dropped out of junior high school due to severe migraine headaches. Just before starting junior high, his parents moved to Oregon, California, and Texas, all within a two year period. Kevin was home schooled for some of this period and managed to complete eighth grade, but spent some of this time not attending or completing any school at all. The family then returned to the local area where Kevin attended the junior high for two months. As the migraines caused him to miss more school days and lose credits, Kevin tried to attend the alternative school, but thought that the teacher graded there him unfairly and stopped attending. He also did not work during the five years before attending the college, "Can't find a job. Tried to. It's kind of hard around here." When I asked Kevin what he had been doing for the last five years, he replied:

> Nothing, really. Nothing at all. I came here for a little while and studied for my GED. That's about it. That's all I really did

Having never attended high school, Kevin had little knowledge of the academic opportunites open to him at the college even though he lived only two blocks from the campus:

> Well, a couple of my friends go to college. None of my parents went to college though, so - my mom always wanted me to go, but then I dropped out of high school, so I didn't think I could do it. I found out that with the GED you could still go to college, so that's what I decided to do...I got the Early Start Scholarship in the mail too, so that's when I decided to go. Because I wanted to go, but I didn't have enough money, and then that came in the mail, and all I had to pay for was books. So I decided to start.

At this time, Kevin did not know about federal financial aid, but learned about it during the brief orientation period when he took his placement test at the college. He also did not realize that the Early Start Scholarship allowed him to take up to seven credit hours, so he enrolled for only three. During his first semester, he completed the applications for financial aid and returned for a second semester, but his headaches caused him to miss too many classes to continue, and he withdrew. During these first two interviews, I advised him to contact the Office for Students with Disabilities.

In a follow-up interview, Kevin said that he had tried during the summer to meet with the Director of Services for Students with Disabilities but she was on maternity leave. He had not tried to contact her in the following four months. Because he only completed two interviews, Kevin did not comment very much on his classes, other than that he enjoyed them and that he "liked being on campus." He was hoping to return to college within the next year.

Leanne

Leanne originally took two college pre-nursing classes in TechPrep during her junior year of high school, and she successfully completed them. However, she later dropped out of school at seventeen. At that point, her mother realized for the first time that Leanne was involved with drugs and entered her in a six month rehabilitation program. After successfully completing the program, Leanne thought about re-entering high school but decided against it:

> I knew I needed to do something. I needed a GED, or else. I knew you needed a GED or a high school diploma. I didn't want to go back. I was going to go back to high school, but I thought, no, I couldn't do this. I had seen the kids who where in there, and I was totally different. And then I want back (for a GED) because my brother had mentioned it. I got it in six months.

Leanne moved to Indiana to live with her father and complete her GED, and then she returned to the local area to live with her mother and attend the community college. These experiences were difficult for her to talk about and difficult to recover from. When I asked if she had considered any colleges in Indiana, she replied:

> No, 'cause I knew I didn't want to stay there really. I knew I would be in Arizona. I thought about going to other places, like NAU maybe or something, but right now, I don't have the money to do that unless I apply for scholarships. I think it's easier, just right now, to stay here and have room and board and not have to worry about dorm rent and all that stuff. It just seems overwhelming right now to me. I couldn't anyway go to a university yet because I don't have all my requirements done. But I have thought about it - going to a university after I get all my credits done.

At the time of this interview, Leanne did not know that you could enter a university as a freshman with no college credits, and she did not know that she could get the same financial aid she already had to attend a four-year college. She did, however, know that there were jobs available on the community college campus that had flexible hours:

> She just hired me in June. I came out here because I couldn't really find a job out in public, you know? But I had been wanting a job out here, and I applied for a few positions, like in the front office. I finally got the job (in a different area), that's what I wanted. It's easier to go to work here and go to school here because they're so lenient with you 'cause they allow you to go to classes. 'Cause out in the public, once you get into a job, they're like, "Oh, no, you can't have this day off." You know? They don't care if you go to school. So I'd rather work here. I just prayed about it, and I got the job here.

Leanne had been a good student in high school, and she found the academics at the college fairly easy, although, like many students, she has conflicting reflections on her classes. This is her assessment of her first semester at the college:

> Math I thought was a little bit too easy, you know? I thought it was going to be a little bit harder, but it was easy. English - I struggle with English. I'm a great writer and reader, but when it comes to punctuation, oh boy! You know, it's like - there's so many rules. But I did good. It's what I expected...Finals were kind of a surprise. It was like everything I thought I knew, it just slipped out. Like I couldn't remember anything. My CIS 100 final was very - I didn't think I was going to pass it, but the teacher was like, "I'm not going to help you guys at all." But she ended up giving us a few hints, you know? And if I hadn't had all those hints, I probably wouldn't have passed. Not really any surprises. What I expected really. Besides like, - at the beginning of the year there's a lot of people in the class, but by the end of the year, it seems like real quiet for the teachers. Especially in my English class, we started with a full class and at the end of it there was eight of us left. I was just surprised. I mean you never saw those people around again. I thought - well, okay.

Leanne enrolled for nine credits each semester, so that she could work at her job on campus and not get "overwhelmed." She had distanced herself from her previous high school friends and managed her schedule so that she took most of her classes with a close friend on campus:

> Well, we met - I knew her in high school and we met around town. And at that time, you know, these was some crowd I was hanging out with that don't do the things they should be doing. She was like the only friend that I could depend on that wants things out of life, you know? And so - we just talked about taking classes, so we did. 'Cause we did both, you know, encourage each other to do

classes. I mean we both want to go into nursing, so we're both kind of just trying to do things together.

Although she had taken some pre-nursing classes in high school, Leanne was not yet committed to declaring nursing as her major:

Right now, I'm kind of debating if I want to go into nursing or like medical terminology. It's kind of a toss-up. I mean, not medical terminology, transcription. Because I'm interested in that, but I really want to be an RN. So I'm kind of like tossed-up right now. But I know I still have to take medical terminology for medical transcription, so it's like I've been debating. That's the only controversy I've had so far. Sometimes, I think I want to be a nurse, and sometimes I think I don't really know what I want to do.

By the time of her later interviews, Leanne was beginning to think about transferring to a four-year college because her friend was leaning in that direction. She actually visited the Northern Arizona Campus one weekend:

We were up in Flagstaff last weekend, and we went to the University. Just drove around it. But I don't know what I'm going to do. I could just stay here. It's cheaper 'cause I can live with my mom and not worry about so many things. You know? It's a ways away. A couple of years away still.

In her later interviews, Leanne was appreciative of her community college experience even though she did fail one of the upper level math classes:

Well, I think that the teachers I've had here made it easier than in high school. It seems like it was harder in high school than it is in college. To me that's how it seems. It seems like it was harder in high school to me, easier for me now because I want to learn now, and in high school I didn't. Maybe that's why. And it seeems like the teachers here are really good. You know? Like my math teacher is like - whoa, I actually understand math this time, you know? And it was like in high

school, I didn't understand math. I knew easy stuff, but when we got to the harder, it was - Whoa, I can't do this! And she made it seem so easy. Se we just - it's easy right now. I don't know. I could have a different answer later.

Leanne is still enrolled at the college, has retaken the math and passed it, and is completing her last requirements for the nursing program. She continues to work on campus. She thinks that without a college degree she couldn't, "get anything and survive."

CHAPTER 5 DATA ANALYSIS

Overview

The findings from this study are presented using the framework of Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure. Tinto's model describes and explains the interactive factors, external or internal, that could directly or indirectly influence the departure of a student from college (Tinto, 1993, p. 114). I have focused on the section of Tinto's model that addresses the pre-entry attributes of students because I was exploring how these students made their college choice decisions. I wanted to know what factors might have influenced the students before college entry that led to this particular college.

The three pre-entry attributes listed by Tinto are family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling, all of which are referred to as external factors since they are not part of the internal system of the college. The pre-entry attributes affect each other, and are also important because they affect the intentions the student has when entering college, for example, whether the student intends to complete a degree. They also affect the individual's commitment to goals and to the institution:

> Individuals enter institutions of higher education with a range of differing family and community backgrounds (e.g., as measured by social status, parental education, and size of community), a variety of personal attributes (e.g., sex, race, and physical handicaps), skills (e.g., intellectual and social), financial resources, dispositions (e.g., motivations: intellectual, social, and political preferences), and varying types of precollege educational experiences and achievements (e.g., high school grade-point average). Each attribute is posited as having

> a direct impact upon departure from college as suggested, for instance, by its well-documented effect upon levels of academic performance in college (Tinto, 1993, p. 115).

The pre-entry attributes are general categories of student characteristics that have been gleaned from decades of research on student success or departure from colleges. Historically, most of higher education research has been conducted on students attending four-year institutions, and Tinto's model emphasizes the factors a student experiences before deciding to leave an institution. For the purposes of this study, however, I have focused only on the pre-entry attributes of college students because these three categories are so general that they can be applied to students at the community college, and would assist in building and organizing a portrait of students on the threshold of their college careers. And although this model is meant to address issues involved in student departure, I did not make any assumptions about the participants' success or failure while setting up this study. I only intended to gather a rich description of each participant's decision making, and to follow each participant through the first year of college experience.

Models are helpful to understanding reality and its "important factors and the relationships between these factors" (Bean, 1990, p. 150), but the model has to fit the circumstances and population which it is trying to explicate. The students in this study enrolled at the college after a process that is nearly the opposite to the lengthy process delineated in the marketing study done by Gilmore, Spiro, and Dolich (1980), and other studies conducted on students at four-year colleges. That study describes a lengthy, logical progression of events. These events, such as sending away for brochures, visiting campuses, discussing colleges with family and friends, lead students into a smooth transition from high school to a carefully chosen college. This study is not helpful to understanding the community college students at High Desert Community College.

Tinto's model is more appropriate for this study because it shows that the process of selecting a college is dependent upon the relationships among each student's three pre-entry attributes. If these three areas of a student's life are not coherent enough to move the student toward entry into the college system, the transition becomes very difficult. When the transition does become too difficult, the student looks to the local community college as a viable opportunity. It should be noted that in the following discussion, it is very difficulty to refer to one pre-entry attribute without discussing how that attribute is connected to the others.

Pre-Entry Attributes

Family Background

In various studies done on student attributes, family background is usually limited to such factors as ethnicity, income level, parents' educational level, and parental encouragement. Using qualitative methodology in this study produced additional important factors such as single parent families, health problems, relocations during previous schooling, and periods of inactivity that also had an impact on the students' academic choices.

As can be seen from the participants' interviews, the lives of many of the students were interrupted by divorces, job changes, and relocations. Two students in the study were raised by their original birth parents, two were raised in families with a mother and stepfather, and the remaining eight were raised by single mothers. In several cases, the participants also occasionally lived with extended family members rather than a parent during junior high or high school, and one student was totally financially independent from her parents and paid rent to live with them. Although being raised in a single-parent family is not necessarily related to academic choices, it has to be noted that in many cases this is compounded by the evidence of poverty, multiple relocations, and school changes, all of which are probably related to the original family structure. And as Tinto's model

demonstrates, the pre-entry attributes affect each other. In this study, the configuration and circumstances of the student's family definitely affected the student's chance to remain in a public school district long enough to accumulate credits and maintain stable friendships. Family problems were often severe enough that it would be illogical to imagine that they did not impede the student's progress in school; for example, Cathy stated that she "lived with my sister and my mom, and finances were not so good." Consequently she left her high school and moved to Arizona to live with an aunt in the hopes that her mother's life would be more "stable." But when she enrolled in her senior year of high school in Arizona, she faced difficult problems fitting in socially with local students who had been educated together for years.

Relocations were an important factor in the academic life of the students that is directly related to the family background. Ike moved to the local area during junior high school with his mother and brother after the death of his father. He had originally started elementary school in the Los Angeles area, but had moved back and forth between Arizona, California, Georgia, and Florida several times in childhood. During one interview, he recalled three elementary schools he had attended, but could not remember the names or places of all the schools. Nor could he explain why his family had moved so often:

> I don't know. Just off, they like to move around, I guess, or something like that. They just wanted to be moving off.

In this case, he may have been unwilling to discuss more personal family problems, but the constant moving left him confused about the chronology of his own life. At one point he lived with an aunt instead of his parents and then moved back with his mother for a short time to attend the local junior high, but he's unsure when this was:

> Sixth or seventh grade, I can't remember if junior high was sixth grade or maybe fifth. I think the one in River City was.

I asked Ike if it was difficult to change schools:

> Yeah, probably takes getting used to and lose all your friends. I don't know, we kinda like settled down here for awhile.

Ike dropped out of school when it became apparent to him that the junior high would require him to repeat a grade. He had lost credits from moving, and he was also going to be starting in a new building with a different group of students.

Helen had also lost substantial credits when she moved from California to the first town in Arizona. When I asked Helen if her mother had approached the high school about this situation, she answered:

> No. And I'd complain about stuff, and nobody could do anything about it. I talked to the counselors. The counselors couldn't do anything about it because I had no tests showing exactly what I was doing or anything. And the class descriptions didn't make sense with what they were teaching there, so they didn't know where exactly to place me. And they didn't bother to test me or anything, which I thought was very stupid, but they didn't bother to. It was just a very, very weird place to go. I suggest that only people who go there be (a member of a specific religion) because it is a very, very religious part of the state. And if you're not, then you're nothing there. What you say means nothing.

Greg dropped out of high school at fourteen after moving to a new city in California with his mother. This move caused extensive social problems for Greg:

> Just that I didn't like it. I wasn't there very long at all. I went to a very rich, preppy high school, where it was just dished out, just very snobby, and I didn't like it being there. So I caused a lot of problems and got out.

Greg continued to live with his mother during this time, but did not seem to recover from the experience of moving. After attending and being "kicked out" of two continuation schools, he was sent to southern Arizona to live with a sister:

Well, I was pretty much doing nothing in California, so I moved out to a small town to live with my sister and got a job there and stuff. Things didn't work out good with my sister. My grandfather drove out. He lives in the mountains and I live with him. He told me to get a job or go to school, and I said, "okay."

Ten of the twelve students in this study experienced at least one relocation during their public school years, and five of those ten dropped out of high school before completing a diploma. Certainly other factors contributed to each student's difficulties with various school systems, but it was evident that loss of credits, friends, and continuity, often followed a move. Some students found ways of coping with the move that were more productive then others, but all students were affected by the disruption.

Another important part of the family background of participants, and a much more positive one, was the encouragement they received from family members to go to college. In some cases, participants made the decision to enroll in college when their mother or a grandparent gave them a choice of getting a job or going to school. Families showed concern about these students and thought that taking classes was a good choice, even though in most cases parents and grandparents had little specific information about the college as previously noted in a study done by Nora and Rendon (1990).

A period of inactivity after graduating from high school or after dropping out of high school was sometimes the reason family members began encouraging the participant to take college classes. For some participants this period seemed to be a time of indecision, or occasionally a time between jobs that had not gone well. In other instances, this period was clearly a time to recover from drug or alcohol problems in high school, or was connected to other health related problems.

Leanne moved to the local area when her parents divorced during her first year in elementary school. She chose to return to her father's home in the midwest after becoming involved with drugs in the local high school:

> And then I dropped out. For awhile, I just didn't -- I was in bad, you know? It just wasn't very good. I just got mixed up in the wrong crowds, you know? So I decided to get my GED. I went to the midwest to get away from here for awhile. And then I came back here. Told my mom I would go to college here.

When Leanne came back to Arizona, she looked for jobs occasionally, and turned down the only offer she received which was to work at a gas station. When I asked what she had been doing for the year and a half since her return to Arizona, she replied:

> The last year and a half? Well, I just started taking classes in the spring of '98. And before then I wasn't doing very much but breathing.

Leanne's mother continued to suggest that she enroll in college. Other participants discussed being inactive during the period before enrolling in college and expressed feeling bored and depressed. Ike had worked a part-time job as a grocery bagger for two of the three years he was out of school: he saw his decision to attend college as being interesting compared to the inactivity of being home:

> At first it was kinda - I don't know - different. Because I had been out of school so long. After I got used to it, I started liking it. I don't know. I was sitting around - not doing anything was kind of depressing. But I'm glad I'm going to school - it's like something decent. I thought it would be better; I like it a lot.

Kevin, a student who did not complete either junior high or high school, was too young to work or take college classes when he first dropped out, and consequently stayed home for five years before enrolling at the college. During his childhood, his mother had encouraged him to pursue college, but misinformed like many parents, she assumed he could not take college classes with just a GED. It was not until a GED instructor and several friends discussed college with Kevin that he decided to enroll.

Conversely, some students reported a strong need to "stay busy," which they credited to encouragement from their families. These students maintained a substantial

number of credits and worked jobs on or off campus. Originally a high school student concurrently enrolled in the community college, Cathy credited her aunt with encouraging her to take classes at the college as a way to become more independent and responsible, but it is also obvious that enrolling at the college helped her to cope with moving to a new area. This is her explanation of how she came to campaign for Student Government:

> I just worked hard, and I wanted to be a part of the college atmosphere here. 'Cause in the high school I had a hard time meeting people, and it's like really hard to do those kinds of things when you're brand new, and it's the last year of school. So I just thought that since people are all new here at the college than I have a good a chance as anybody else.

Unlike Helen and other participants who had relocated during the school years, Cathy had the benefit of staying in the same school district until she made the decision on her own during senior year to move to Arizona. Still, it was obviously difficult for her to move, and she considered the students in the local high school to be "unfriendly." Her method of coping with the move was to find a place in the college and keep busy.

Elaine began taking classes at the college during her senior year and also participated in Student Government. Elaine's mother had encouraged her to take college classes as a way to meet people. Elaine thought it was "way better" to keep busy by taking classes, working on the weekends, and participating in the high school theater group. Elaine had appeared in or directed every play at the high school during the year she was interviewed for this study. However, Elaine also had the benefit of staying in the same school district until the single move to Arizona during her junior year.

Skills and Abilities

Students' abilities are generally measured by grade point average and standardized achievement tests. Because this was a qualitative study, I was able to ask questions about students' progress in high school and college classes and hear their perspectives on their

own abilities. As it developed, five of the students had no high school records at all, and several had changed schools enough to affect their grades. Only three of the participants had taken either the SAT or the ACT. Asking the participants their opinion of classes, teachers, and high schools, however, often brought forth a wealth of self-evaluation, especially difficulties and strengths in specific academic areas.

Helen, as mentioned, had writing skills that could have propelled her easily into a four-year degree program. One other student, Dorothy, had a strong belief that her writing skills would be sufficient to succeed, and she was accurate in her assessment. Dorothy moved back to the local area after attending public school in the Phoenix area and will be graduating from the college in Spring of 1999. She has been accepted at a large regional college in the southwest in a journalism program. Like Helen, she was aware of her writing talent from a young age because she wrote for the high school newspaper and the school yearbook. I asked if she had any job experience, and if she would consider a job instead of pursuing her writing, she responded:

> Yes, I've had lots of jobs. Well, not lots, but I had jobs through high school. My first job was in my sophomore year, and I stayed there a year, and then my senior year, I had a couple of jobs. I worked at the church I attended, and no - it never crossed my mind not to go to college. I mean I probably could get away with it, with my writing talent, but like I said, - but I don't want to live from one book to the next, or from one publication to the next, worrying about what I'm going to do. And I think that just this first semester in college has helped me enormously with my writing abilities.

Dorothy's grade point average was so high she was eligible to be nominated for outstanding graduate of the year. Before graduating, she decided to delay her transfer to the university because an advisor pointed out to her that she could take several more

classes at the community college for free on a staff waiver since she also worked at the college.

The two students in the study who started at the college while in high school, Elaine and Cathy, had abilities in so many academic areas that attending college classes was another way that they could challenge themselves and keep busy. They had both taken honors or advanced placement classes in high school and had completed the college prep curriculum. They had a chance to develop leadership skills in Student Government, and, in general, acclimate to the college atmosphere before transferring to their chosen universities.

Other students were not as fortunate. The students who dropped out of high school were unsure what skills they had, except for Ike, who had developed an interest in computers from playing computer games with his brother. This interest was related to his family background. Ike's brother, who was only one year older, had been the first family member to become interested in computers, and was "always messing around with them." Although the two brothers had only part-time jobs, they had put together a very sophisticated computer system at home. Ike entered college with more experience with computers than most people have when they leave college. Although an extensive knowledge of computers would prepare any student for college, I think that Ike's ability was fostered by his family background in this and in other areas. Ike's brother had been the first one in the family to work on completing a GED and the first to enroll in college. Ike had been tutored by his brother while preparing to take the GED, and Ike always seemed to have an insider's knowledge of classes, instructors, and job opportunities that undoubtedly came from his brother.

Abby, the student who attended special education classes throughout elementary and high school in the midwest, was struggling with the most basic arithmetic taught in the Adult Basic Education program offered through the college. In grade school, she had

been diagnosed as having a learning disability, and she thought that her education had been severely deficient in high school. Abby's family background is important in this regard because even though she had problems in high school, an aunt continued to encourage her to go to college, as did her high school advisor.

This family encouragement seemed to over-ride Abby's sense that she might not have the math skills and other academic abilities to be successful in college. Abby worked closely with the Office for Students with Disabilities on campus and took only nine credits each semester. However, each semester she dropped at least three credits as the work became difficult for her. At the time of her first interview, she was having difficulty keeping up with a sign language class which she thought was being taught too fast:

> The only thing with my sign language class is no matter how much you told him kinda like, "slow down," you went faster. I can't learn that fast. And I had to have it slower on some things because I have my learning disability. I learn some things faster than the other kids and some things slower than them. And that's just one that I grasped some of it, but as more time went on, he kept going faster and faster. And it was to the point where I couldn't handle it.

Abby was aware that the other students kept pace with the class, and she withdrew before failing it. But with her family's encouragement, and with some previous experience tutoring students, Abby had developed the determination to try college:

> My main thing was teaching younger kids with learning disabilities. That has always been my dream, my goal since I was very young, since I was about six, seven years old. That's how long I've wanted to be there. And everybody else when they were asked, "Oh, what do you want to be when you grow up?" - and it changes. But when they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up - "a special ed. teacher." That's what I've always wanted to be. I mean my mind has never changed.

In later interviews, Abby began to talk about getting a Child Development Certificate instead of an associates degree so that she could work in a day-care center. This certificate does not require math or English classes.

It is difficult to address the diversity of the skills and the abilities that these twelve particpants brought to the college as if there were a recognizably pattern. These student more closely resemble the student population of a public school, and they benefitted from the open-door policy of the community college and its broad array of course offerings.

Prior Schooling

The prior schooling of the twelve students in this study included almost every possible situation except private schooling. Geographically, their attendance had included schools from Minnesota to California, from rural Utah to urban schools in Phoenix, Arizona. Only one student had started kindergarten in the local school district and continued there through high school graduation. This is understandable considering the in-migration that this area has undergone in the last twenty years. This regional attribute has a major impact on the schooling of these participants.

Some students definitely benefited from college-oriented high school programs and made an easier transition to college than others. Dorothy, the student who has already been accepted to a journalism program at a university, attended a high school in the Phoenix area and took almost all honors sections of her classes. This was particularly helpful because her high school English class included a college orientation segment. In this class, she had been required to interview a college dean from Arizona State University and write an essay on the academic requirements necessary for a degree in journalism.

Living in the urban area had given Dorothy other valuable learning experiences. Since several of her high school events were held on ASU's campus and an older sister had attended classes there, she knew at least one four-year college campus very well. She also accumulated college math credits while in high school by taking an extension course

from a community college in the Phoenix area. Dorothy also had experience at the community college campus in this study; she remembered it vividly as a child before moving to Phoenix in second grade. During her junior and senior years in high school, she had considered educational options including attending a community college in Portland and several universities. Although her prior schooling would have been sufficient to help her be successful at any of these options, again this factor is influenced by her family background and other personal attributes that demonstrate that college choice is a very complex process:

> They (her friends) all wanted to go and be in dorms and stuff, a lot them did. And I just - I don't like living with people I don't know. And they were going off to the universities, which was neat for them, and I could've done that, but my stepdad really wanted me to go and live in a dorm and be in a sorority, and I was just not interested in that at all. That's one of the reasons I choose - ended up choosing here, because I knew that if I moved here I would be living with family. And I would rather be living with my family. And I would rather live with family or live alone than live in crowded quarters with people I don't know. It's just an unsafe feeling for me, you know?

Although she had academic credentials and SAT scores that gave her an array of options, she is weighing factors that don't often appear in statistical portraits of incoming freshmen students:

> And I considered a lot of things, and I decided that my best thing to do was to come here since I got the staff tuition fee waiver. And so I - after here I wanted to go to a university, but I thought that I should take advantage of this opportunity. It's not worth paying for something that I can get for free. And when I came here it turned out to be a lot better than I expected - a lot - a lot better.

Like Dorothy, Elaine and Cathy had taken advanced placement classes in math, science or English in high school and were already considering graduate degrees. I think that these three students probably had characteristics that were more similar to first year students at a four-year college than to the other students at the community college. They came from families with moderate to upper level incomes, had accumulated college preparatory credits, had good grades, had taken either the SAT or ACT, and had some parental and school counselor guidance when considering colleges. But even in these cases, the importance of the families' relocations and of personal interests has already played a role as well as the prior schooling in selecting a college. I would point out that Elaine's description of her college search strategies were similar to those described in the Gilmore et al (1981) marketing study:

> I personnally got it myself (college information). Yeah, of course, when I started my junior year, my senior year, colleges started sending me stuff, but I knew what I was interested in, and I knew I wanted to go back up to Minnesota to go to college. I was looking at the University of Minnesota to begin with, but then Mankato started sending me stuff. And I started reading their literature, and I found their website, and the teachers really helped to inform me with stuff. So I ended up writing them - like the theater program started sending me scholarship information and how to get theater scholarships. The English - one of the English teachers e-mailed me back and told me all I had to know.

Cathy's and Elaine's mothers had completed two year degrees, and Dorothy's stepfather had a law degree. On the other hand, they shared the characteristics of having moved at least once if not several times during their school years, and of having come from family situations that did not include both birth parents.

It is also noteworthy that all of Dorothy's credits were paid for through a family tuition waiver; Elaine and Cathy used scholarships offered by the community college for

local high school students to pay a portion of their tuition. Also, I thought it was interesting that Elaine and Cathy thought that the local high school was similar academically to their midwestern high schools. Although this rural high school does not offer the upper level maths and sciences, these two students were generally well-prepared for college work. Elaine thought that the high school in Minnesota was very similar to the local high school:

> In class it's the same. But the general policies - like in my school, we could eat. It was like a college...The discipline was the same that they have here.

Four of the students in this study were enrolled in community college classes during their junior or senior year in high school, even though in some cases this meant completing college developmental classes before proceeding to college level classes. Also, almost all of these students had taken at least one class tuition free through the Early Start Scholarship program for high school students and GED graduates.

On the other hand, the prior schooling of many of the students in this study was very erratic. Leanne and Brenda, two of the students who dropped out of high school, had problems with drugs during their teen years. Although they did not dislike school or begin high school having academic difficulties, they ran into academic problems soon after becoming involved with drugs.

Leanne had completed two years of college preparatory courses and two classes at the community college through dual enrollment when she dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade. She is now experiencing difficulty with the math requirements at the college, but has maintained good grades in her other classes. It is obvious from the interview data that she is very aware of her academic limitations; this is her explanation of why she takes only nine credits each semester:

> So I can work. And I kinda didn't want to overwhelm myself right now. 'Cause I know English 101, you've got to write a lot of reports. That's what I hear. I don't

> want to overwhelm myself and not be able to concentrate on what I'm doing. Some students could do it, but I want to know how to do it and be able to do it, and not be too overwhelmed by too many classes. And not four classes. I think that's enough right now. And maybe during the spring - maybe I'll try for twelve or something like that. I'll try to get higher and see how I do with more classes. But I don't want to overwhelm myself.

It is likely that Leanne's prior schooling in the local high school would have been sufficient to prepare her to attend a number of colleges, but her involvement with drugs affected her ability to complete that schooling, and to prepare herself for a second move to attend a university.

Brenda had been born in California, raised in a northwestern state, and moved to the local area just before starting junior high. She dropped out of high school at the beginning of freshman year. Brenda characterized her earlier years in school as being the class clown, but she thought she learned easily, and she maintained good grades. She dropped out of school before turning sixteen and remembered almost nothing about her three months of high school. After several years of part-time jobs and moving around the western U.S., she returned to this area, studied for the GED for a month, and passed it.

I thought Brenda also seemed wary of taking on too many academic commitments. Although she expressed an interest in several programs, including the Registered Nurse degree, she decided to start by taking the classes for a certificate in the Nurse Assistant program. In her first semester at the college, she took mainly developmental classes and then completed the certificate requirements during her second semester. The students who had not finished high school, Leanne, Brenda, Greg, and Kevin were more reluctant to take a full load of classes, or even discuss long range plans. I found that Abby, who had a high school degree but far fewer academic skills, was much more vocal about her determination to finish a teaching degree, but the students who lacked high school

experience had a "wait and see" attitude about their college plans. For Brenda especially, without any high school experience and having held very few jobs, her nurse assistant training while in prison had probably taken on a greater significance than it might have otherwise.

All three men in the study had dropped out of high school, and all three had very negative memories of their experiences. Greg believed the high school classes to be repetitious and boring:

> They were extremely boring. Basically it was all review. It was so dull. I tried to tell them I already learned all this stuff before and are you people smoked or what? It was very dull.

Ike pinpointed more specific problems to explain why he thought college was easier than high school:

> I couldn't really concentrate in high school. Maybe it's the teachers. I don't know. 'Cause I - like some to the teachers I remember they would be sitting there, and the assignment would be on the board. They wouldn't even teach you. They would just be sitting at the desk, saying, "Here's your assignment." Then they'd just sit there. They didn't even teach the whole thing. Just sit there at the desk.

Unlike the other students who dropped out of high school, Ike had the two advantages that outweighed his lack of school experience, the encouragement and guidance of his older brother, and his prior knowlege of computers. I think that these two advantages made a remarkable difference, since Ike is still in school and doing well academically, but the other two male participants have dropped out.

Kevin, the third male student in this study, had dropped out of high school due to migraine headaches. Here again, the student's family background and personal attributes can hardly be separated from a discussion of his educational background. Kevin had started school in the local area, but had moved to three other states during his junior high

years. Around the time of these relocations, he began experiencing migraines severe enough that he could not attend school. When I asked if any of these school districts had a home extension program, he explained:

> Yeah, there was home schooling but it cost money. I couldn't afford it. I was home taught in Texas for a year. And I passed two grades in one year because I had failed seventh grade here for the same thing - losing credits. Yeah, then I went to Texas, got home taught, passed seventh grade in about a week, and the eighth grade in the rest of the year. So, I went back to school one more time after that in the alternative school which wasn't very good at all, so I just dropped out then.

Upon moving back to Arizona, Kevin attended the alternative high school for about two months, and after a grade dispute with a teacher dropped out in the equivalent of ninth grade. Kevin successfully completed developmental classes in his first semester and enjoyed being on campus. During his second semester, he began missing classes and withdrew from the college due to the migraines.

Math classes seemed to be the most difficult problem for the students who not finished high school. Leanne failed a developmental math class during her second semester. Greg and Kevin both avoided taking the math classes because they thought they would not be able to complete their other classes and a math class in the same semester.

I think that the success of Brenda, Ike, and Leanne demonstrate that the students who had dropped out of high school and had an erratic educational background were not necessarily the students in the most difficult position academically. Although these three previously had negative experiences in public school, they expressed interests, motivation, and a desire to learn:

> Leanne- And then I took CIS 100. I enjoyed that. With Mrs. Smith, I liked it. But actually I'm anticipating classes right now for the fall. I'm ready. I have this urge

to just keep learning more, you know? And it's sad that when you're in high school, you don't really realize how much you really want to learn. Really, you just can't get enough of it. I'm really anticipating this fall. I want to do good.

Ike- Yeah, I like it. Actually I like going now. At first it was - kind of made me nervous. But I enjoy it now. I've probably learned more the first semester than I have all together in school. I never cared in school. But I don't know, it seems like it's a lot easier now to learn.

Brenda- I see all these other things that are going on, you know, all these other programs that they got, and it's kind of interesting. You know, some - now I'm not sure that nursing is what I want to go for, there's so many other things you can do. I'm pretty excited.

Also, although these students had no high school transcripts and had not taken any standardized college entrance exams, they all reported passing the GED exam on the first try and with little preparation. It is quite possible that they were high school dropouts who had self-selected to return to school because they knew they could succeed.

To conclude the discussion of Tinto's model, and to integrate it with the interview data on the first year experience, I will use Helen's data as an example of how the complex interactions among the pre-entry attributes demonstrates that it is a difficult task to predict a student's retention (Figure 3). From the very first interviews that I conducted with Helen, it was clear that she had attributes that both propelled her toward college and pulled her away from it; in fact, these attributes seemed to be in almost equal balance.

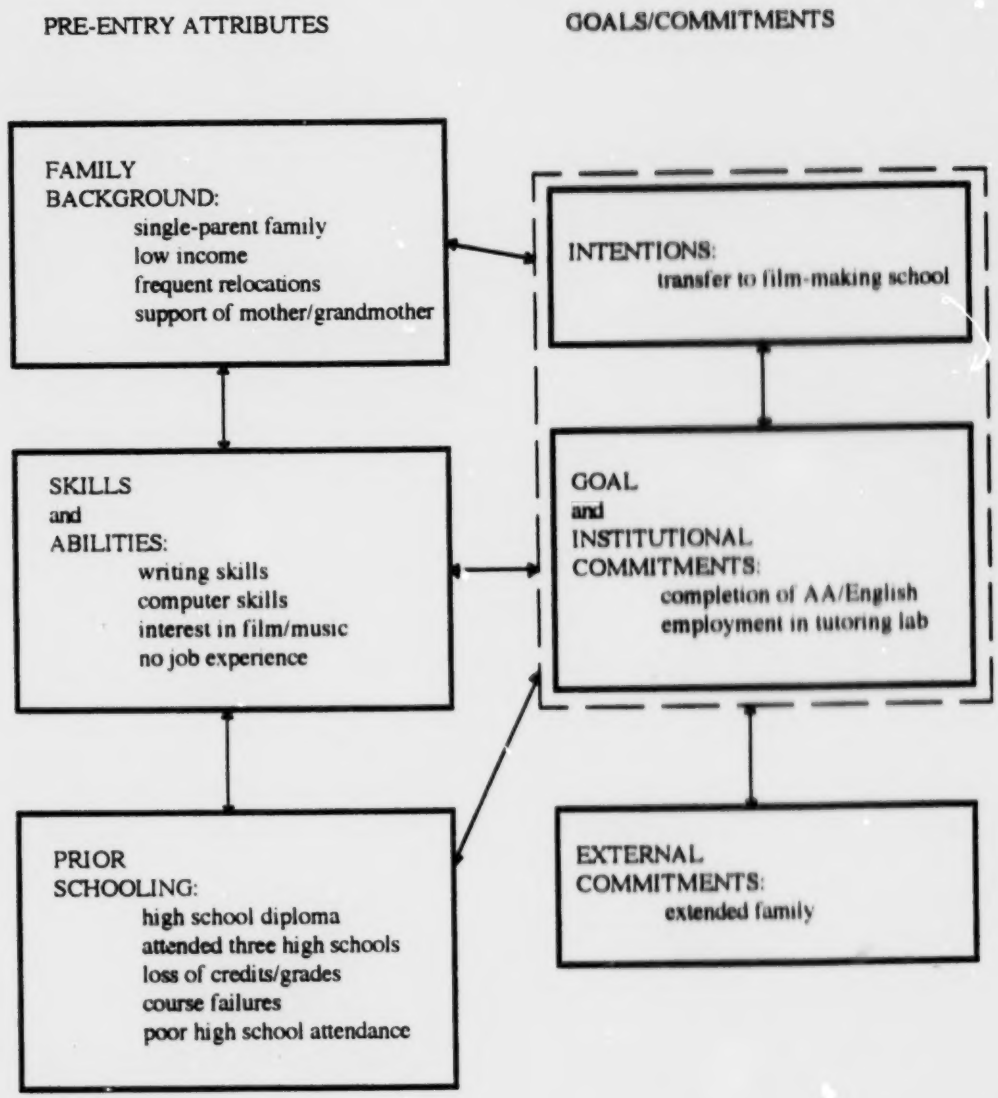
In the interviews, Helen was articulate, energetic, and knowledgeable about the campus. On the other hand, she was one of the students who moved not once, but twice, during high school. She often skipped classes while living in California, lost credits in the first move to Arizona, but then did very well academically in the local high school for her senior year. Helen's mother, who had four younger children in the home, had

introduced Helen to computer software programs and the internet, but had not visited Helen's high school to make sure her credits from California transferred to the first high school in Arizona. But Helen attributed her enrolling at the community college to her mother's and grandmother's suggestion. Helen didn't drive, but she always found an available friend to drive her to campus.

Helen reported that her extended family had no income other than her grandfather's Social Security payments and her mother's "welfare." This lower socio-economic status by itself would have been a typical characteristic of a community college student, but it would have oversimplified the circumstance of Helen's life. Her mother had previously had a high-tech, well-paid security position using computers to gather industrial information. Also, Helen had been on the college preparatory track of classes in high school, had been repeatedly encouraged by both high school and community college faculty members to pursue a writing career, and had a very clearly articulated idea of pursuing a music video or film school goal. She was also socially integrated into the campus, much like Cathy and Elaine, an important characteristic of students who are more likely to transfer to a four-year college (Nora & Rendon, 1990).

Figure 2

Helen's Pre-entry Attributes



Conversely, Helen had spent a year staying at home, not taking classes and not working after she graduated from high school. But again, this might have been a period when she finally had the time to sort out what she wanted to do in the future without having to cope with the vicisitudes of adjusting to new schools:

> What I was thinking about when I was home for that year was - mainly I would be sitting there watching MTV, analyzing what I was seeing. And I noticed what I was seeing a lot of the times what the song was about had nothing to do with the visuals. And that bothered me, and I did not like that. So I wanted to change that. And my mom kept bothering me about getting a job or doing something, and I figured going to college I would have a better chance of being able to learn what I neeeded to do to be able to change that.

Helen had sent away for college brochures and applications, but she did not know either her high school or college advisors very well and did not work with them on a frequent basis. Helen did know, however, that she could enroll in the community college at a much later date than would be required at a four year college, and she also knew to apply for financial aid. Eventually, it was Helen's lack of attention to the rules for financial aid and her inability to repay $280 that resulted in being unable to complete her degree. At the time that she became ineligible to return to campus, Helen had a high grade point average and a substantial number of liberal arts credits completed. However, she had not taken either the required upper level math or lab science during her three semesters at the college, a discrepancy often characteristic of students who fail to transfer to four year colleges (Lee & Frank, 1990).

Pre-entry Attributes and the College Role

As in Helen's case, the college itself can have little impact on many of the pre-entry attributes of a student; it can not make a parent more attentive to a child, it can not standardize a student's high school experience, nor can it keep a local community from impressing its values on the high school student. In Tinto's model, the college is nested in the external environment that the student has been living in and adjusting to for many years. Once in the internal world of the college, Tinto explains that the student must still balance these external factors and commitments:

> In this instance, external commitments are seen as altering the person's intentions (plans) and goal and institutional commitments at entry and throughout the college career. And they do so in a manner that is largely (but not entirely) independent of the internal world of the institution (p. 115).

External commitments and pre-entry attributes establish the initial conditions under which the student interacts with the college, but the college often has very little direct influence or even knowledge of these factors. In Helen's case, the college had provisions for integrating many facets of Helen's life into the college, such as providing developmental classes to improve the basic skills she lacked, and offering an extensive creative writing curriculum. But the critical factor in Helen's progress at the college became the relationship between her lax attendance, her inattention to a withdrawal policy that allows students to withdraw until the second to the last week of classes, and her resulting financial problems with the federal government.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

In this chapter I discuss the theory that students chose to attend this rural community college because the students had family backgrounds that were highly influential in their lives and in their decision-making, because the students could attend the college with little information about college programs or requirements, and because, once the students were enrolled in the college, they found an environment and a curriculum that appealed to a very diverse group of students. The second section of the chapter uses this theory to make specific policy recommendations to enhance the college's ability to recruit and retain students. And finally, I have included recommendations for further research.

A Portrait of Students at a Rural Community College

Before discussing the three main parts of this portrait, I would also note that these students had characteristics that overlapped with those previously discussed in the review of the literature on community college students. They definitely had problems financing their education, and some had previously had academic problems, although it is not necessarily clear that the problems were caused by a lack of intellectual talent.

The Importance of Family

In general, family background, one of the pre-college attributes of students that is important in Tinto's Model of Longitudinal Departure, led to the students' original decisions to attend college, their adjustment to college, and even their basic characteristic of diversity. One of the questions that this study was structured to address was, why do students enroll at this college? Every student in this study said that they enrolled at the college because a family member had encouraged them to do so. In some cases this was a straight forward progression from the family member taking classes at the college, or reading the college mailings, and relaying information to the prospective

student. In other cases, it was a more generalized encouragement to do something with their time or their life. Many times, this was a double-edged occurance because family members were often the source of misinformation about the college.

Also the interviews included information that students had talked among friends about college, and had some information from high school teachers and counselors about college. It is possible that the student had been considering college for at least some amount of time, and only responded that it was suggested by a family member as a way to validate the decision. This is an important possibility since many first generation students must cope with the appearance that they are breaking off from non-educated family members. It any case, it is extremely important to understand from this study that family members are influential to the students and to their decision making.

The student's family affects their decision-making and their progress at the college in many different ways. Students often cited the desire to show their parents that they could be successful, or that they could overcome previous problems with drugs or school failures. Some students simply didn't want to disappoint their parents in any way and were willing to attend college even though they weren't sure they wanted a college degree. Most students also saw attending college as being a first step in becoming independent from their families.

Without question, the students who had a parent or older sibling actively helping them adjust to college had less anxiety, more accurate information, and even to some extent seemed to participate in the life of the college to a greater degree. They didn't seem to have to ask, "Am I doing the right thing for me?" because they trusted the family member to show them the way. But in other cases, the students' families appeared to be innattentive, allowing the student to drop out of high school before the age of sixteen, or being unaware that the student was using drugs. These students had a

much more difficult time at the college compared to Ike, who was guided by his brother, and Dorothy, whose extended family gave her so much help.

In terms of Tinto's model, their family members affected their skills and abilities by introducing them to academics, computers, careers, and other areas of general background knowledge. They also affected the prior schooling of the student by encouraging them to complete high school or a GED, but unfortunately, family members were also the source of the many relocations these students experienced. Most importantly, being able to live with a family member while in college was very clearly the reason that several students chose to attend this specific college, even in cases where attendance meant relocating from another state.

Lack of Information and Misconceptions

Another characteristic of these students that I think is important to note is the lack of information they had about anything to do with the college system, from the concepts of majors and degree programs to a basic understanding of how to pay tuition or use financial aid. This part of the portrait is extremely crucial for the members of the community college to understand because college workers often assume that the students won't find the college too different from high school, or too difficult to navigate. In reality, these students have already experienced multiple problems with the high school systems, or had no experience with a high school system, or have never had the time or opportunity to learn about colleges. The information that these students did have was often highly inaccurate, and they often made college-going decisions based on that information.

It is obvious from the interview data in this study that the students were not choosing to attend this college because they had collected information, compared programs and faculties, explored financial options, or evaluated the college in terms of competitive options. In fact, most of these students had not even participated in the

easiest methods of gathering information, such as attending Senior Day while in high school or talking to their high school counselors about college programs.

The interview data also showed that many of these students, probably for a variety of reasons, had very high levels of anxiety about attending college, being in classes, or living away from family members. College faculty members and administrators are familiar with the nervousness that new students exhibit, but this data showed that many students actually made their college-going choice based on what made them feel less nervous, uncomfortable, or unsafe. This is also a very logical outgrowth of the unfortunate exeriences these students had in the educational systems as they relocated to different schools, different communities, and different, sometimes hostile, cultures. Also the lack of information about college, and the peculiar misconceptions present about huge auditorium classrooms with non-English speaking instructors made attending a community college one of the few choices these students were willing to consider. Generally, it wasn't until the student had experienced taking classes for a semester or two before they showed a commitment to learning about programs and degrees.

The community college offered these students a very low stress environment to work in. It was a "nice little campus" because it is small, uncrowded, inexpensive, and still had the college level classes that were comparable to a four-year college. It was obvious that students knew that the bureaucracy was minimal; they were unconcerned about applications or paperwork. They simply showed up on campus a few days before the semester started and enrolled for classes. They had a casual attitude toward the requirements for degrees, and knew that they could ask an instructor or advisor what they had to know when the time came for them to declare a major or choose a class. For the most part, they wanted jobs on campus because the scheduling was flexible and the

people were friendly. In many cases, being able to live at home with family members was another anxiety-reducing aspect of the college.

Diversity

In gathering the data from these interviews it appeared to me that the one crucial attribute of these students is that they are diverse even when they fit into fairly typical categories for community college students. They have diverse levels of ability and diverse family backgrounds, but in many ways the college is best suited for working with their diverse prior schooling experiences, whether it includes honors level high school classes or little schooling past the eighth grade. This diversity coupled with the previous lack of research conducted on traditional-age students in rural community colleges makes it difficult to achieve the level of generality necessary for a substantive theory. On the other hand, it is data that can lead to a better understanding of rural students, a place to begin discussing their characteristics. This is an important goal of qualitative research:

> The constant comparative method can yield either discussional or propositional theory. The analyst may wish to cover many properties of a category in his discussion or to write formal propositions about a category. The former type of presentation is often sufficiently useful at the exploratory stage of theory development, and can easily be translated into propositions by the reader if he requires a formal hypothesis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 115).

Diversity has to be seen as the foundation and the most important characteristic in developing a portrait of these students, not in terms of age, race, or ethnicity, but in terms of the pre-college attributes of family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling. The twelve students interviewed in this study certainly do not represent all of the students at this community college or any other, but these extensive interviews were helpful to developing a clearer understanding of who these students are as part of

the community that this college serves. Traditional age students are generally seen as a cohesive group because they are most often from low-income families and are the first generation in their families to attend college. In terms of the academic characterization of new students by Cross and others, the high school students who choose to attend a community college are generally in the lower one-third of their graduating class. That might be a fairly accurate demographic generalization when dealing with large numbers of students, but I did not find it to fit the students in this study. Four of the twelve students in this study were at the top of their high school classes, while five students had no high school standing at all. At least one student, Helen, was an exceptionally bright student who simply had difficulty working within the framework of the high school culture, and consequently had very erratic grades. And one student, Abby, was in a Special Education program where the grades assigned were probably not related to the typical high school grading system. Also, two of the students who had not completed high school were involved with drugs which lowered their ability to achieve academically although both said they had been about "B" students before dropping out of high school.

By looking at each student individually, the interviews revealed diverse pre-college attributes that the community college was ideally structured to handle. These students found a diverse curriculum that offered math and English preparation from the third grade level through the core curriculum needed for university transfer programs. The college offered occupational certificates, as well as upper level English, math, and science classes that could be transferred to four-year colleges.

In non-academic areas, the college provided an environment that very definitely appealed to all the participants. They remarked on the quiet, non-competitive atmosphere, which for those students who had experienced problems adjusting to high school or to several relocations was very important. I think that the consensus among

the participants in this study that the campus was "a nice, little campus," "mellow," "relaxed," and "quiet" was an indication that these students had found a place to achieve without experiencing the previous problems of their schooling. Another important part of this consensus that the campus was "nice" was the low level of bureaucracy involved in enrolling at the college.

It should also be noted that the students in this study had diverse intentions of what they wanted to accomplish while at the college. Some students were very clear that they only wanted to accumulate university transfer credits, and they only wanted to accomplish that goal if it was convenient. Others had very specific degree programs in mind. A few, like Kevin and Greg, wanted to avoid working in "dead-end jobs." Some students, like Janice and Freida, were trying to complete at least the required classes while looking for direction in their lives.

Policy Recommendations

The college in this study currently has resources for students directed to a wide spectrum of age groups, from Elderhostel courses to primary grade fine arts classes for children. The college has been creative and resourceful in canvassing the local community to develop popular programs. The college has also obviously created and developed programs that appeal to recent high school graduates because it garners a large percentage of this population compared to other community colleges. But there are two major problems identifiable from this research. The first is that students do not receive the maximum benefits from the college because they enroll with limited knowledge of the college's programs and bureaucratic structure. This lack of information is problematic among students who have recently moved into the area, and for those who have dropped out of school. The second issue that needs addressing is the number of students who seemed to enjoy their college classes and profit from the instruction, but who dropped out for non-academic reasons. This section will address

these two problematic areas by utilizing the specific findings in this study, the importance of the student's family in influencing college decisions, and second, exploring methods of reaching students who have "fallen through the cracks" such as students who have recently moved into the area or have dropped out of high school.

Reaching The Family

The students in this study did not follow the Gilmore et al model of college choice. They were not able to allocate time and energy over a two or three year period to an extensive college search because they had many pre-entry situations that used their resources elsewhere, or limited their access to information. It was in most cases the encouragement of a family member that actually propelled the individual to try college. At this time, the college does not offer full scale orientation sessions before a semester begins to either parents or students, it does not have any recruitment personnel, and it does not have any programs aimed at the parents or guardians of high school students other than the Early Start Scholarship. Each campus has a fulltime academic advisor who visits the local high school to administer the required assessment test once a year. During all assessment tests given by the advising office, on or off campus, a brief orientation to the college catalog is presented, lasting about twenty minutes at the end of the two and a half hour testing session.

In the Gilmore et al marketing study, many students attended an information night with their parents at a number of colleges to begin their college search. This idea has many beneficial effects. It gives the college the opportunity to convince family members how important their encouragement is to their junior high or high school age children. It also gives the college an opportunity to start the orientation process by discussing various degrees and certificates, the placement process, transfer requirements, financial aid, and the college catalog. An orientation period that is

separate from the testing situation would be more relaxed and could be a chance to highlight student activities and students clubs that seem to attract the younger students.

A separate orientation can also be a time for college personnel to hear the parents' concerns for their children as well as the parents' assessment of the educational needs of the community. An opportunity for parents or students to meet and talk to advisors and faculty members would increase access to information about the college while reducing the anxiety level that the students in this study so often expresssed. The current orientation during the placement testing is too brief and is being given to students who have already made the initial committment to attend the college. The college should explore offering voluntary college information nights targeted toward family members, and other methods of approaching the parents of high school and junior high age students.

The students in this study were generally knowledgeable of the mailings that their families received in the home including the class schedule and the Early Start Scholarship, and apparently this was a productive method of getting information out to the community. More specific mailings targeting the dissemination of small, important elements of college information could increase the community's knowledge in general about financial aid, career services, the new language requirements mandated by the state, and various ways the community college can help a pre-college student meet these requirements. These mailings could be brief, informative, and varied in topics from semester to semester. Even promotional style postcards could carry enough information about financial aid to begin the process of college orientation.

At this time, the college has a small Public Information Office that distributes general information to the public in a variety of ways other than mailings, but the environmental scan of the community completed within the last two years showed that a large proportion of the community still lacked specific information about the college.

The problem is probably not the lack of distribution of information, but the generalized nature of the information. Radio, television, and newspaper spots raise the community consciousness of the college, but do not, for example, emphasize specific program areas, such as stating that the college has one of the most successful practical and registered nurse programs in the state. They do not promote the excellent computer labs maintained on campus that would be interesting to high school students and recent graduates. Most importantly, they do not promote the availability of financial aid and the low cost of the college compared to other state institutions.

Approaching the family in less formal ways would be productive also. Since the average age of students at the college is 38, it stands to reason that many of these enrolled students have children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and friends who might be interested in visiting the campus by attending class with this adult. A family day once a semester in classes could give faculty members a chance to promote the college and their own programs. This idea might be inappropriate in a traditional four-year college setting, but the community college in this study has a majority of classes composed of women in their late thirties and early forties. They are concerned about their children's educational progress and want to encourage them in a variety of ways. And their children are often curious about the classes that their mothers are taking.

I think the interview clearly points out that the most effective recruitment of high school students was through offering the Early Start Scholarship, and yet many adults in the community do not know about the scholarship because it is promoted in the high school, and through a letter mailed directly to the graduating senior and family. Several students in this study learned about the college from aunts, uncles, grandparents, and family friends who did not have information about either the scholarship or financial aid in general. Students who have dropped out of high school and moved into the local area

have almost no resources other than their extended family, so community awareness of the financial opportunities at the college are critical.

Relocated Students

To pursue traditional-age students in this region, the college must account for the steadily increasing population growth of the county. Methods have to be developed to reach new members of the community who have moved here since graduating from high school, as well as reaching new students at the high school who have not had time to learn about the community college through high school advisors. Joint activities between the high school and the community college need to be increased that emphasize college orientation. The community college could designate faculty members or academic advisors to work directly with each public school, with home schooled students, and to explore ways of reaching new community members (Richardson, Jr. 1992).

The local high school currently does not have any orientation program for new students other than having the new student meet briefly with the high school advisor who gives the student a schedule of classes and a student handbook. The new student is then taken to their first class by a student escort and left to manage the rest of the day on their own on a multi-building campus with over 900 students. The college, on the other hand, has a population of pre-teaching students in the preschool, elementary, and secondary levels who must earn lab credits for the Introduction to Education class. I would recommend that at least a small part of these credits could be earned by providing general academic advising in the public schools that emphasizes college orientation. This advising assistance could be specifically targeted to students new to the high school within any given semester.

Increased resources in academic advising are crucial right now because of the sweeping curriculum changes that are occurring statewide at both the high school and

college level. The second language requirement currently being instituted by the state of Arizona offers an ideal situation for the college to offer its expertise to the school districts. Junior and senior year level language classes could be offered on the campus during summer sessions, or refresher classes offered for those students who wish to ensure that they pass the language placement testing. Many students are interested in fulfilling the language requirement by taking American Sign Language which is only taught at the college level, another opportunity for the college to set up joint programs with the high school or junior high school. The language requirements could also be an opportunity for the college to initiate an honors program jointly with the high school, as it appeared from this study that many of the high school students who were dual enrolled at the college were excellent students looking for a new academic challenge.

Leaving College

In this study, at least four of the twelve participants left the institution for problems that appeared to be unrelated to academics. These four students were not working closely with an academic advisor during their enrollment at the college, and all four were first generation students. These students, like many of the older students at the college, and like Ike and Brenda, will enter the job market with few skills and will learn under difficult circumstances that jobs available to unskilled workers do not pay sufficiently to live on. It is quite possible that increased practical information about careers coupled with more college orientation would convince students that college is an effective and efficient pathway to future opportunities. Although the college has a small career services program, none of the students in this study knew that it existed.

The college Retention and Tracking statistics report that nearly 30 percent of entering students at this college are aspiring to transfer to a four-year institution. However, if the respondants were required to choose from a list of possible degree

programs, it is very likely that the student's lack of knowledge and understanding of transfer programs and careers would give a clearer picture of how undirected entering students really are. The academic advising, college orientation, and career exploration which already exist at the college are ways to address this lack of information and possibly increase retention, but these services have to promoted more extensively. It is possible to make these services slightly more intrusive by requiring that all developmental classes and English 101, which is required by every degree program, must cover specific areas of college orientation in the course curriculum.

The students in this study often learned about the college from the class schedule that they received at home, but they had almost no information about financial aid and even less about specific certificates and programs. They learned about financial aid when they came to campus to enroll, but they often lacked enough information about it to use it effectively. They often did not know or understand the college policies for withdrawing from classes and how these would affect their financial aid. When they did have trouble maintaining their financial aid, they did not return to the financial aid officer to negotiate problems, but simply dropped out for the semester. It would seem possible that federal financial aid at the very least could be tied to a mandatory orientation session, and possibly the Early Start Scholarship could require a one-hour college orientation also. Bean (1990), Richardson (1992), Tinto (1993) and many others have documented the need for a good fit between the student and the institution to keep the student from dropping out, but when students enter the college with very little information, register within a week of the beginning of the semester, and have no orientation, it is easy to infer that the students do not have the tools to navigate through a complex institution and a demanding two-year program.

Suggestions for Further Research

The southerwestern states of the United States are going through a period of growth and change that will undoubtably continue for at least another decade, probably longer. Although this seems like the immediate situation that needs to be addressed, I think that population movements have been chronic in almost every area of the United States, and it has only been recently that we have begun to understand the serious educational problems this creates (ERIC Clearinghouse on Ubran Education, 1991). The question is, how does an institution plan for a community population that is steadily changing?

Most institutions analyze their policies and their mission first by identifying the specific educational needs of the service area community (Knoell & McIntyre, 1974). Demographic research needs to be maintained on an ongoing basis, and if possible methods of standardizing demographic research across the United States need to be studied so that school dist.'cts and colleges have ready access to information about their own areas as well as areas that contribute migrants to their educational systems. In particular, this research needs to target gathering information about low-income and single-parent families as they appear to be more mobile.

Although there has been research in the past on the difficulty of chronic relocations among migrant workers' children, it seems evident from this study that even one or two relocations during a student's public school years needs to be studied as well. Why are relocations so difficult for students and why do some students seem to cope with the move better than others? Also, basic research on the reasons why people move in the first place seems to be superficial. Students in this study reported that their parents moved to be with family members or to obtain better jobs, which are two common reasons cited in research as well. But I thought intuitively that there was more to these decisions because they were often so radical in nature.

Research on methods of standardizing the transfer of credits among school districts throughout the United States would help the schools, parents, and students who struggle with complicated bureaucratic problems. This does not necessarily require a standardization of curriculum, since colleges have already shown that credits can be transferred between institutions that are much more diverse than high schools.

I would also recommend that more research needs to be done on the educational disruptions faced by students who have experienced drug or alcohol problems while in high school. Those students who dropped out of school in this study felt considerable anxiety upon returning to school, but it also appeared to me that there was a possibility that they were having problems with memory and the ability to organize their academic work.

Jansen and Wildemeersch (1998) have pointed out that four year colleges have willingly accepted the cost and liability of maintaining dormitories and student life activities that bring middle-class students into the universities and have educational value as well. In fact, any educational system can develop goals that encompass more than classroom learning. But students from lower income groups in the community colleges, who have experienced the struggle of single parenting, poor educational backgrounds, and exposure to multiple social problems, are not usually offered benefits that might appeal to them, such as recovery groups, counseling, and educational programs structured to empower the student.

It did seem likely from this study that having a job on campus was very important to students, not just financially, but for including the student as a member of the campus community, as well as orienting the student to the professional atmosphere and work of the college. Students had a very positive attitude toward their supervisors and fellow workers on campus that was missing in their descriptions of their high school experience. Maintaining a small, quiet environment was positive also. For this

specific population of students, who had experienced chronic disruption in their academics and had a high level of anxiety about adjusting to college, the size and general atmosphere of the college actually became an important retention feature of the college. I would also like to see more research done on the benefits of campus jobs and the campus cultures that seem to incorporate the student into the environment. Certainly there must be other services that would assist these students to remain in college longer and benefit more from their college experience, but without further research on programs that appeal to low-income students it is difficult for the college to devise specific retention methods.

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APPENDIX A

Interview One Questions

1. When did you decide to enroll at High Desert College?

2. Have you ever attended another college?

3. What were you doing in the year before you enrolled at HDCC?

4. Did you receive information about HDCC? What type?

5. Did you have information about other colleges?

6. Did you visit other colleges or community colleges?

7. Did you visit HDCC before enrolling?

8. Did you talk to anyone about HDCC? Parents? Friends?

9. Did you talk to anyone at the college before enrolling?

10. What would you be doing this year if you were not taking classes?

APPENDIX B

Interview Two Questions

1. Are the classes you are taking more or less what you expected from college? Any surprises?

2. Have you thought about degree programs, majors, or transfer programs?

3. Have you talked to anyone regarding these programs? Have you talked to an advisor at HDCC? At another college?

4. Have you talked to friends at other colleges about their first semester? Does it seem similar to yours?

5. Are you working? How many hours? Will you continue to work there?

6. Are you planning to continue at HDCC next semester?

7. Will you take the same number of hours? Fewer? Why?

8. Do the classes seem more difficult than high school? Less difficult? Similar?

9. At any time during the semester have you considered dropping out? Not returning next semester? Why?

10. Do you still have the goals in attending college as you did when you started?

APPENDIX C

Interview Three Questions

1. What is you general reaction to the classes you have taken so far?

2. What is your evaluation of the instructors?

3. Are they better, same, not as good as your high school instructors?

4. What do you think is the same as previous schoolwork? Different?

5. Have you talked to an instructor outside of class? How often? How many?

6. Do you know many students in your classes? Do you talk to them on a regular basis?

7. Have you participated in any student groups? SGA? Phi Theta Kappa?

8. Have you attended any college events? Concerts? Art Shows? AIDS Quilt display?

9. Have you used the library? cafeteria? Computer Center? Success Center? Book store? Have you gone to pre-registration advising? Career Center? NAU Advisor?

10. Do you have any complaints?

11. Have you talked to friends who went away to college?

12. Do you wish you had gone to a larger college? Why? How would it be different?

13. Will you transfer to a four-year college?

APPENDIX D

Interview Four Questions

1. How did the year go, overall?

2. Will you return next semester?

3. Have you thought about degree programs, etc?

4. Did you receive financial aid? Was it sufficient? Would you take classes without it?

5. Have you talked to friends about classes here? What did you tell them?

6. If you had worked this year instead of attending college, how would your life be different? Would you rather be working?

7. If you had gone away to college how would it be different from HDCC?

8. Do you wish you had gone away to college?

9. Do you think you will always live in this area? If not, where?

10. What type of job do you expect to get in the future?

APPENDIX E

Sample Memo

Memo Three 9/10/98

As I look over the statistics for the state of Arizona, for Mohave County and for Kingman, I realize it should have been obvious that relocation would be a part of these student's lives. However, it is still unclear to me how to categorize this phenomenon. Is it the moving itself which is difficult, or is it the problem of changing schools repeatedly that causes difficulties for the student?

Also, why would relocation necessarily make a student chose to attend a community college, other than the fact that he or she wouldn't have to relocate again? This makes me think that relocation isn't the category I want for this. It's possible that relocation is just one other "hitch" in a student's adjustment.

APPENDIX F

Sample Codes

1. knew college from hearsay
2. problems with credits in high school
3. high school personnel
4. no other college
5. need to keep busy
6. not many friends in high school
7. relocation ~.5 returning to origin
8. importance of family
9. influence other than parents in college choice
10. college forever
11. expectations
12. started college in high school
13. financial problems important
14. knowledge of other colleges
15. living w/family, not parents
16. parental problems
17. work is important
18. not connecting w/parents
19. would attend w/o F.A.
20. not much information

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APPENDIX G

Script for Classroom Solicitation

My name is Sue MacMichael and I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Richard C. Richardson at Arizona State University in the College of Education. I am conducting a research study of the decisions students make concerning their college choice.

I am recruiting subjects to be interviewed four times over the next year which will take approximately one hour for each interview.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your classes or grades in any way. The results of the research might be published, but your name will not be used at any time during the collection or publication of data.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (520) 757-4331.

APPENDIX H

Consent Form

October 10, 1997

Dear Student,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Richard C. Richardson at Arizona State University in the College of Education. I am conducting a research study to learn more about the decisions students make when they choose a college.

I would like you to participate in the study, which would involve being interviewed four time over your first academic year at Mohave Community College. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, and it will not affect any of your classes or grades. The results of the research study might be published, but your name will not be used at any time during the collection of the data or its publication. The interviews will be tape recorded, and all tapes will be destroyed when the project is completed.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is an opportunity to evaluate your decision to attend Mohave Community College, and learn more about the academic programs, degrees, and classes at the college.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (520) 757-4331, Extension 1222.

Sincerely,

Sue MacMichael

Sue MacMichael
English Faculty

I consent to participate in the above study.

Name_____ **Date**_____

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in the research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through Karol Householder, at (602) 965-6788.

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APPENDIX I

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